

# ITALY

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# GENERAL PROFILE





Italy is located in the Southern part of Europe extending into the central Mediterranean Sea.

It borders with Austria, France, Slovenia and Switzerland.

The official language is Italian and Catholicism is the official religion.

Italy is the third largest Member State population-wise, with a population of fifty eight million citizens.

Italy's currency has been the Euro since 1999, when it joined the Eurozone.

Italy is a parliamentary republic with a prime minister as its head of government.

Italy was one of the original member states to found the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951, as well as the European and Economic Union in 1957.





Italy's foreign policies have always gone hand in hand with its domestic policies. The two are often indistinguishable.

Despite being a large economy, Italy's economic weakness has long been one of its most prominent characteristics. This has led to the country being viewed as one of the weakest links and least influential of the member states, as well as being considered unreliable in the international stage.



# ITALY CO-FOUNDS THE EUROPEAN UNION





Since Italy is a founder member state of the European Coal and Steel Community as well as the European Economic Community, the question we should be asking is why the original European organizations were founded in the first place, and why Italy specifically wanted to partake in the founding of.

The purpose of the European Coal and Steel Community was for the original six founder member states to be bound to each other by trade bonds so rigid that another large scale war would be inconceivable.

At the time, post-WWII restoration and reconciliation was important to all countries, but Italy specifically needed to rid itself of any prejudices due to the former fascist regime that had been in rule during World War II. Post World War II governing party, the Christian Democrats, saw the European Union as a guarantee for democracy in Italy.







# THE TREATY OF ROME



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The Treaty Of Rome, signed on the 25th of March, 1957, expanded those shared interests into the economic field, leading to the creation of the European Economic Community (commonly referred to as ECE) as well as the European Atomic Energy Community (commonly referred to as Euratom).

Originally, Italy was a fierce opponent of European Integration. The Italian Communist party voted against the Treaty Of Rome when it was presented in the Italian Parliament In 1957, while the Italian Socialist Party abstained. They were both suspicious of the inherent international orientation of the Union, fearing that it would weaken national identity and sovereignty in the country.

Things only began to shift in the seventies. During the Cold War, Euroscepticism significantly decreased, since participation in the EU was seen as a safety net of sorts. Its even reported that during that time period Euroskepticism in Italy was significantly lower than in many other member states.



BERLUSCONI





Berlusconi has been indubitably one of Italy's most influential and controversial figures. After rising to power during the 1990s, he remained a prominent public figure for more than 20 years. He is regarded by many the country's first leader to be such a strong proponent of Euroscepticism.

While Berlusconi was originally elected in 1994, even prior to that the European press heavily criticised him on the basis of being unfit as a leader. His influence significantly increased in 2001, almost a decade after his original rise to power.

The Berlusconi government's goal had always been putting a stronger, more straightforward and confrontational front in the European Union and as the years went on, Berlusconi began implementing increasingly more eurosceptic values within his policy. He is regarded by many to be the first Italian leader to be critical of the European Union and European Integration in whole.

The attacks from Berlusconi's allies on several European Institutes during the early 2000's were as constant as his approval was apparent. The new currency was also heavily criticized.





# THE MIGRATION CRISIS





During the early 2010's, the migration crisis was one of the main issues Italy was faced with. Only few of the thousands of migrants that reached Europe through Italy were planning to permanently reside there, but their presence alone was enough to cause great concern to Italian politicians and citizens.

This overflow was staggering for the entirety of Italy, and specifically for the destitute areas of the country that were the ones who had to bear responsibility of assimilating the newcomers into their accommodation centers, working force etc. This caused a strong wave of Euroscepticism that persisted throughout the decade.





# THE YELLOW-GREEN GOVERNMENT

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The Yellow-Green government was a coalition government formed by the “Five-Star” Movement (symbolized by the color yellow) and the “League” (symbolized by the color green), which was in rule from June 2018 to December 2019. Although the two leaders often clashed when it came to domestic policies, the anti-European stance they shared was evident.

Luigi Di Maio, leader of the Five-Star Movement, had a strong tendency to quarrel with European institutes on a consistent basis, while Matteo Salvini was adopting more euro-critical views day by day, mostly regarding the immigrant flows and border activity regarding Italy. The Yellow-Green government clashed with the European Union on matters concerning the budget law (2019), as well as certain migration laws.

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# GIORGIA MELONI





The election of far-right politician Giorgia Meloni, notably also the country's first female prime minister, has caused the concern of many, due to the exclusionist and hyper-conservative nature of many of her opinions.

Giorgia Meloni's election has left many wondering about the shift in tone when it comes to several matters of importance to the European Union, such as migration (to which Meloni is opposed) or matters of national defence. As the European Union does not seek for Italy to become an illiberal state (take Hungary and Poland for example), the chances for disagreement with Brussels increase. Fortunately, Meloni has promised not to break the unified front that is in support of Ukraine when it comes to the Russian-Ukrain war.

However it must be noted that when asked, Meloni reported that her duty and priority is to serve the interests of Italy first and of the European Union second.



# EUROSCEPTISM IN ITALY





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Italy's stance on Europe has differentiated significantly in the last thirty years. Varying from a Europhile and one of the founder member states, to one where Euroscepticism represents a large part of the population.

The Eurobarometer posted on 2017 reported that 52% of Italians do not trust the European Union, and things have not been getting any better since.

The 2023 Eurobarometer reported that still, 50% of Italians do not trust the European Union

The current prime minister, Giorgia Meloni claims to be pro-EU and pro-NATO. However, Italy's influence has decreased substantially during the last few years. This is mostly due to the relative instability of government, the inability for long term decision making on Italy's behalf.