

Chapter 16

Italian Governments and Political Parties Vis-a-Vis the War in Ukraine



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16.1 Introduction

Russia's war in Ukraine, and whether to provide military assistance to Ukraine, remains a controversial issue in Italian politics at both the government and political party levels. The bloody war unleashed by the Russian Federation on February 24, 2022, was, alongside the COVID-19 pandemic, the primary focus of the former Prime Minister Mario Draghi's national unity government. Draghi's military assistance to Ukraine, the authors believe, was the main, although not the only, reason behind the political fallout in the summer 2022. This support remains critical and seemingly unwavering under the current Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and her right-wing coalition government.

Therefore, this chapter aims to dive into the positioning of the previous and the current Italian governments and how the political parties have been positioning themselves vis-à-vis the Ukrainian war. Draghi's government, its response to the conflict, and its military, political, humanitarian, and economic support to Ukraine is one aspect of this chapter. Another one is the posture of the Meloni executive concerning

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the invasion will also be discussed. Then, in the second part of the chapter, the attention will shift to the main Italian political parties—namely Fratelli d'Italia, Lega, Forza Italia, Partito Democratico, Movimento Cinque Stelle, Italia Viva and Azione, also known as Terzo Polo, and their leaders' positions.

16.2 Draghi's Government Vis-a-Vis War in Ukraine

Since Russia's unprovoked and unjustified invasion began on February 24, 2022, Italy has supported Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity in international fora and assisted it militarily, humanitarian, and economically. The government led by "Statesman of the Year"¹ Mario Draghi did not hesitate to condemn the war, stand with Ukraine, and take all necessary measures. On February 25, just one day after the Kremlin launched its military aggression, then-Prime Minister Draghi declared a state of emergency to provide Ukraine with the support and assistance it so desperately needed, and still needs. Three days later, on February 28, Mr. Draghi declared a new state of emergency, this time with the aim of specifically addressing the economic and humanitarian fallout from the war in Ukraine. The two decree-laws, which became known as "the Ukraine decree" (Official Gazette, 2022a) and "the Ukraine decree bis" (Official Gazette, 2022b), include a set of urgent measures in the military, humanitarian and economic sphere designed to address the Ukraine crisis. The first would be later converted into law, while the second incorporated into the law and abrogated during the conversion process (Official Gazette, 2022e).

Mario Draghi's government condemned Russia's decision to invade Ukraine and all the attacks and illegal annexation attempts that have taken place since February 24 in the strongest possible terms. Contrary to how past administrations reacted to Russia's invasion of Crimea, Draghi took an unequivocally firm stance towards Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine. Not only did Draghi distance Rome from Moscow (and Beijing), reversing decades of dependence on Russian energy, and vocally reaffirm the importance of the transatlantic bond with Washington through NATO, the G7, G20 and other international formats (Coratella & Varvelli, 2021), but he also pushed for EU sanctions against Russia and for granting Ukraine official EU candidate status (Fazio, 2022).

Despite initially opposing measures involving energy imports from Russia (Financial Reuters, 2022a; Times, 2021) and cutting Russia out of the SWIFT international banking payments system (Saini, 2022), the former Head of the European Central Bank would eventually be the one to pressure for a "price cap" on Russian gas (Euractiv, 2022) and for sanctions targeting Russia's Central Bank (Pop et al., 2022).

¹ On September 19, Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi received the 2022 World Statesman Award from former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger at the 57th Annual Awards Dinner of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, for "his long-time multi-faceted leadership in finance and public service that has benefited Italy and the European Union and has helped international cooperation". See <https://www.governo.it/en/articolo/il-presidente-draghi-riceve-il-world-statesman-award/20540>.

Draghi notoriously supported Ukraine's bid for EU candidacy and persuaded French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz during a joint trip to Kyiv last June. The picture of the "Big Three" European leaders united around a table on a train *en route* to Kyiv will undoubtedly go down in the history books. Draghi also held repeated calls with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Russian President Vladimir Putin to convince the Russian President to sit at the negotiating table and agree to a ceasefire. He might not have succeeded in his intent, still, his repeated calls with Putin contributed to unblocking over 20 tons of grain stuck in Ukraine's Black Sea ports, avoiding a food catastrophe (Orlandi, 2022).

In the UN, Draghi's government was among the main sponsors. It was actively engaged in drafting Resolution ES-11/1 on the aggression against Ukraine adopted in the 11th emergency special session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) with 141 in favor, five against (namely Russia, Belarus, North Korea, Syria, and Eritrea) and 35 abstained (including China) (Al Jazeera, 2022). Two months later, Italy's then-Minister of Foreign Affairs Luigi Di Maio presented a four-step peace plan to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres involving: (1) a cease-fire accompanied by supervisory mechanisms and the demilitarization of the front lines, (2) an international political guarantee about Ukraine's neutrality, which would leave its EU candidate status untouched, (3) a bilateral agreement between Presidents Putin and Zelensky on the future of Crimea and the Donbas region, and (4) a multilateral peace agreement between the EU and Russia. The EU would essentially drop its sanctions in exchange for a staged withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukrainian territory (Ciriaco, 2022). The plan did not go down well with Kyiv (Reuters, 2022b) or Moscow (Ansa, 2022a, 2022b), however, and was quickly put aside.

16.3 Humanitarian and Economic Assistance

In 2022, Draghi's Italy donated a little over €130 million in humanitarian aid to Ukraine (of which €110 million was in direct budget support) through the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS) (Open AID–AICS, n.d.). Since February 2022, Italy has supported humanitarian initiatives in Ukraine by various international organizations (the EU, the UN, the OSCE, the OECD), NGOs, and civil society organizations.

Within the EU framework, Italy has provided Ukraine with in-kind assistance (e.g. medical supplies and healthcare materials, shelter items, and vehicles) through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism (EUCPM) (European Commission, 2022a; 2022b), an EU mechanism established by the European Commission in 2001 to facilitate cooperation between EU member states and participating countries in the event of both natural and man-made disasters (European Commission, 2022a). Italy also supported the Commission's decision to allocate up to €9 billion to support Ukraine's relief and reconstruction (European Council, 2022). It contributed to the approval on May 24, 2022, of a Council of the EU's regulation allowing for temporary trade

liberalization and other trade concessions related to certain Ukrainian goods to help the faltering Ukrainian economy (Council of the EU, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c).

In the UN, Italy voted in favor of the UNGA Resolution on the humanitarian consequences of the aggression against Ukraine adopted on March 24 (UN, 2022a), the resolution suspending Russia from the Human Rights Council on April 7 (UN, 2022b), and that condemning Russia's attempted illegal annexation of four Ukrainian regions (Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia) on October 12 (UN, 2022c). Moreover, the country joined UN Agencies on the ground. It contributed to financing a €10 million project in cooperation with UNHCR in Moldova to help improve the country's reception and assistance capacity, explicitly focusing on minors and vulnerable people in need. Additional projects were developed in cooperation with the IOM and UNICEF.

In the OSCE, Italy supported the decision to activate the OSCE Moscow Mechanism on the Human Dimension and launch a mission of experts to address Russia's human rights violations and abuses committed on Ukrainian soil. The mechanism allows OSCE participating States to request that an ad hoc mission of independent experts be launched to investigate adherence to the OSCE's human dimension commitments in their own territory or in that of another OSCE member (OSCE, n.d.).

In the OECD, Italy played a key role in the decision adopted by the Council to suspend Russia's (and Belarus') participation in OECD bodies (OECD, 2022a). In addition, as Chair of the 2022 Ministerial Council Meeting, Italy pushed to discuss the crisis in Ukraine at the Council meeting at the ministerial level that took place in Paris in June 2022 (OECD, 2022b).

Additionally, in its role as President of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, on March 16, 2022, the country presided over the Committee's decision to exclude the Russian Federation from the Council of Europe after 26 years of membership (Council of Europe, 2022).

It is also worth mentioning that Italy has actively supported Ukrainian initiatives meant to address ongoing human rights violations. In March 2022, the country joined a group of International Criminal Court (ICC) member countries in their referral of the situation in Ukraine to ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan (ICC, 2022). It also committed a voluntary contribution of €500 million to the Trust Fund established by the Office of the Prosecutor in response to his request to all State Parties to the ICC to assist his overburdened office. The Italian government also expressed its availability to deploy national experts to support the Court's investigations and has made additional contributions to the trust fund for victims. Furthermore, when Ukraine applied to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to initiate proceedings against the Russian Federation under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, not only did Italy support the move but, in a joint statement (EEAS, 2022), it also expressed its intention to intervene in the proceedings and share its interpretation of some essential provisions of the 1948 Genocide Convention, to avoid any misinterpretation or abuse of the Convention mentioned above.

At the national level, Italy has implemented the Council of the EU Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382 of March 4, 2022 (Council of the EU, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c), to provide temporary protection in EU countries for people displaced by the Russian

invasion of Ukraine following EU Directive 2001/55/EC. According to the UNHCR (2022), as of October 2022, over 170.000 Ukrainian refugees have sought shelter in Italy, making it the fourth European destination for fleeing Ukrainians after Poland, Germany, and the Czech Republic. This led Draghi's government to adopt several measures between March and September 2022 (Department of the Civil Protection, 2022a, 2022e; Official Gazette, 2022c, 2022d, 2022f, 2022g, 2022h) to accommodate and integrate fleeing Ukrainians. These involved the Department for Civil Protection (Department of the Civil Protection, 2022b, 2022c, 2022d, 2022f, 2022g, 2022h, 2022i, 2022j, 2022k, 2022l, 2022m), regions, provinces, prefectures, local authorities, the third sector, and civil society. Over €800 million (ONUItalia.com, 2022) were spent to support Ukrainian refugees in Italy throughout Draghi's tenure.

On February 24, Italy sent an offer of humanitarian assistance to the Ukrainian government through the EU *Common Emergency Communication and Information System (CECIS)*, a mechanism established by the European Commission in 2001 to facilitate communication and information sharing during civil protection assistance interventions.² The offer was accepted by President Zelensky the next day, as were the other two offers the Italian government would submit on March 4 and 5, 2022. Since then, the Italian Ministry of the Interior has progressively increased the capacity of both, first, the *Reception and Integration System (SAI)* and, second, the *Centers for Extraordinary Hospitality (CAS)* reception systems. In addition, to make Italy's response at the national level more uniform, the Department for Civil Protection adopted a plan for the reception and assistance of Ukrainian people, as well as additional measures to increase receptive capacity. The Department, regions, autonomous provinces, prefectures, local authorities, and the third sector all play an important role in providing first reception services. Additionally, regional coordination structures have been created to adequately manage reception services and ensure assistance is given to all new arrivals.

In conclusion, Mario Draghi's support for Ukraine was steadfast on all fronts: political, economic, humanitarian and military. Appearing in front of the UNGA for the last time as Prime Minister of Italy last September, Draghi defended that support and stressed that 'helping Ukraine protect itself wasn't just the right choice to make, it was the only choice' (Draghi, 2022).

16.4 Meloni's Government Vis-a-Vis the War in Ukraine

Fratelli d'Italia was the undisputed winner of the Italian election held on September 25, 2022. The election was characterized by a high level of abstention and hence the lowest turnout ever at under 64%, and saw the victory of the right-wing coalition, with 43.79% and 44.02% preferences obtained, respectively, in the Chamber of the Deputies and the Senate of the Republic (Bruno, 2022b, 18–19). The party led by

² For more information on CECIS, please visit https://ec.europa.eu/echo/policies/disaster_response/cecis_en.htm

Giorgia Meloni obtained an excellent performance in both Houses, with around 26% of the vote. In comparison, her opponent, Matteo Salvini's League, emerged weakened with about 8.8%, followed closely by Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia, at slightly above 8%. On the other hand, the center-left coalition, led by the Partito Democratico of Enrico Letta reached about 26% in the two Houses of Parliament, the Movimento Cinque Stelle led by Giuseppe Conte 15.5% and Azione-Italia Viva about 7.7%. The results thus showed a certain continuity, while also making it undeniable that there has been an intra-coalition balance shift, continuing a process already begun several years ago (Castelli Gattinara & Froio, 2021).

It is still too early to express an opinion on whether Meloni's government has handled the Ukraine 'dossier' with continuity or change compared to the approach taken by the Draghi government. From the information and statements of the new executive members, starting with Crosetto and Tajani, respectively Ministers of Foreign and European Affairs, and Giorgia Meloni herself, it is very likely that Italian policy towards Ukraine will be marked by continuity with the previous executive. In fact, the sixth inter-ministerial decree for arms shipment to Ukraine in 2023 was officially passed in January 2023 (Ministry of Defence, 2023f), in continuity with the previous five decrees managed by the Draghi government.

16.5 Italy's Political Parties Vis-a-Vis the War in Ukraine

Except for only the Fratelli d'Italia, all Italian parties supported the executive led by Mario Draghi until the day of his resignation, announced on 14 July and formalized a week later on 21 July 2022. As we have observed, the government crisis of July 2022 involved complex dynamics that cannot be ascribed to one political party and one dossier. It is undeniable that, already by the spring of 2022, numerous tensions, particularly with the Five-Star Movement (Fazio & Bruno, 2022), had destabilized the executive with Italy's military aid to Ukraine and compliance of the annual defense budget with NATO country defense expenditures as envisaged by NATO.

16.5.1 *Fratelli d'Italia*

Fratelli d'Italia (FdI, Brothers of Italy), just like PD under Letta's leadership, has unhesitatingly supported military and economic aid for Ukraine and sanctions on Putin's Russia, both during Mario Draghi's government (when it was the only opposition party) and in the current governing majority, where it represents the central party of the coalition that won the September 25, 2022 election. From the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Meloni had indicated that FdI fit fully into the shared line drawn by the European institutions and the Atlantic alliance. Already in March 2022, Meloni said,

An unacceptable aggression has been made against Ukraine. [...] It is right for the Italian government to remain united with the allies and move with them. On arms, I remember that the Latins used to say that if you want peace you must prepare for war. The government is doing well, we have approved what has been done so far. Even if the executive is not proving to be listened to internationally. Draghi continues to be excluded (Amato, 2022).

It is important to note that the strongly “Atlanticist” and “pro-European” line of FdI has often been viewed with suspicion in Italy and abroad, as on some occasions, Meloni and other party members have not hidden their admiration for Putin’s Russia. For instance, in her autobiography, Meloni states, “[...] but Russia is part of our European value system, defends Christian identity and fights Islamic fundamentalism” (Meloni, 2021: 317).³ However, on these points, even before Meloni was sworn in as Italy’s new Prime Minister, she had reiterated,

One thing I have been, am, and will always be clear about. I intend to lead a government with a clear and unequivocal foreign policy line. Italy is fully, and with its head held high, part of Europe and the Atlantic Alliance. Those who do not agree with this cornerstone will not be able to be part of the government, at the cost of not being in the government,

and then

Italy with us in government will never be the weak link of the West, the unreliable nation so dear to many of our detractors. It will relaunch its credibility and thus defend its interests. On this I will demand clarity from all the ministers of an eventual government. The first rule of a political government that has a strong mandate from the Italians is to abide by the program that the people voted for (Sky, 2022b).

Even at the political program level (Fratelli d’Italia, 2022), FdI has clearly reiterated its alignment with NATO and the European Union. In point 25 of that program it is written,

For a foreign policy focused on the protection of the national interest and the defense of the Homeland. Full respect for our international alliances, including by adjusting Defense allocations to the parameters agreed upon in the Atlantic Alliance. Standing alongside our international allies in supporting Ukraine in the face of aggression by the Russian Federation. Relaunching the system of European integration, for a Europe of Homelands, founded on the interest of peoples and capable of facing the challenges of our time.

After the victory in the general election of September 25, 2022, in one of her first statements as PM (27 October 27, 2022), Meloni said in the Senate of the Republic that “The only way to facilitate a negotiation is for there to be a balance between the forces on the ground”, and “peace is achieved by supporting Ukraine, allowing it to defend itself, is geopolitics” (Fatto Quotidiano, 2022).

³ In this chapter all translations from Italian have been produced by the authors. Originally: “[...] ma la Russia è parte del nostro sistema di valori europei, difende l’identità cristiana e combatte il fondamentalismo islamico.”

16.5.2 *The Lega*

The right wing, *Lega* (the League) led by Matteo Salvini, is the Italian political party that has maintained the most ambiguous positioning concerning the support for Ukraine and the condemnation of the war unleashed by Russia. The proximity of the Salvini-led party to Putin, his political party (United Russia), and his power circles is a topic that continues to be much debated despite some evidence concerning funding for the League (La Stampa, 2022). Salvini and other members of the League have on many occasions stated that they do not view either Italy's sending of arms to Ukraine or its support for sanctions against Russia favorably. In May 2022, Salvini said, "I have talked about ceasefire and disarmament, so these go by a stop of sending weapons" (Adnkronos, 2022a). Salvini had repeatedly expressed to then PM Draghi his disagreement with sending Italian arms to Ukraine without success. There have also been significant clashes with ally Fratelli d'Italia regarding sanctions against Russia. During the election campaign in September 2022, Salvini had expressed, provoking dry remarks from Meloni, the belief that "Sanctions are fueling the war. Many businessmen are asking me to review them. The Italians are losing out, and the Russians are gaining, so in Brussels, there is someone who has miscalculated", and, still on sanctions, "They are not working, rethinking the strategy is essential to save jobs and businesses in Italy" (Giustetti, 2022).

The League's poor electoral performance (just over 8%) in the general election of September 25, 2022, could have a significant impact in the coming months on the durability and stability of the Meloni's government, as Lega may be tempted to bring down the current government rather than continue to lose party consensus (after all, the instability of the Italian political system is a well-known and well-documented fact).

16.5.3 *Forza Italia*

Forza Italia's positioning vis-à-vis the issue of support for Ukraine has always been controversial. Notably, statements by the former party president Silvio Berlusconi have often diverged from the party's official line, with numerous "corrections" by the party coordinator Antonio Tajani and communications officers who have often spoken of phrases being analyzed "out of context". The European People's Party (EPP) has found itself forced, on numerous occasions, to have to reiterate on social media and with much embarrassment, the alignment of Forza Italia and Berlusconi with its own positions (EPP, 2022a) or even show satisfaction with Forza Italia's election results, confident that "Forza Italia will guide the next government into a path that serves the best interests of the Italian people as part of a strong and stable Europe" (EPP, 2022b).

On the one hand, on almost every occasion concerning a vote in parliament, Forza Italia supported the government led by Draghi. On the other hand, back in May 2022, Silvio Berlusconi had already clearly stated,

We have no leaders in the world, we have no leaders in Europe. One world leader who was supposed to approach Putin at the mediation table called him a war criminal and said he had to leave the Russian government. NATO said that the independence of the Donbass would never be recognized [...] You understand that with these premises, Mr. Putin is far from sitting at a table (Sky, 2022a).

Moreover, as for the Draghi government crisis, while it is true that the Five-Star Movement triggered it with several dossiers, including military support for Ukraine and the annual defense budget, it is undeniable that Forza Italia and the League also contributed to the downfall of the government headed by the former president of the European Central Bank, saying that they would not support a government also formed by the Five-Star Movement (Rai News, 2022).

The second time, on 18 October 2022, in an audio recording (it is unknown whether it was recorded with or without Berlusconi's knowledge), it is possible to hear the president of Forza Italia stating, among other things, that Russians feel at war with Italy because Italy gives weapons to Ukraine (Open, 2022).

In conclusion, as for the League, statements and declarations by Silvio Berlusconi on Russia and Ukraine (but not only on these topics), whether recorded voluntarily or not, risk jeopardizing Italy's right-wing coalition and the Meloni executive in the next months.

16.5.4 *Partito Democratico*

The *Partito Democratico* (PD, Democratic Party) under the former Prime Minister Enrico Letta consistently supported the then Prime Minister Draghi government's policies on the war in Ukraine, even when part of the party did not seem to agree with the line held by the secretary completely. In fact, albeit with some nuances,⁴ the leadership of Letta has always shown agreement with Draghi on support for Ukraine in terms of humanitarian, economic and military support for Kiev and sanctions against Russia (Antonini, 2022). On 25 April 2022, the news of Letta being contested during the celebration of the *Festa della Liberazione*, a national holiday of the Italian Republic commemorating the liberation of Italy from Nazi-fascism, the end of the Nazi occupation, and the definitive fall of the fascist regime, caused a sensation. During the demonstration in Milan, Letta was labelled a "servant of NATO" by a large group of demonstrators, who intended to chase the PD secretary away from the procession (Ansa, 2022a, 2022b).⁵ After the general election of 25 September 2022,

⁴ In June 2022, Letta had, for example, stated "A peace that is not completely just is more just than the continuation of war", see: Palma (2022).

⁵ Similarly, on 5 November 2022 Letta was contested during a demonstration for peace in Rome. See: Adnkronos (2022c).

with the PD obtaining a modest electoral result (19% in the Chamber of Deputies and in the Senate of the Republic), Letta announced a party congress and primaries (March 2023) to elect a new secretary (Florida, 2022), resulting in the election of Elly Schlein. Now, it is not easy to understand whether the new PD secretary will confirm Letta's line, who decided not to run again (i.e. strong support for Ukraine) or will opt for a different line closer to that one expressed by the Five-Star Movement led by Giuseppe Conte (Cundari, 2022).

16.5.5 *Movimento Cinque Stelle*

Movimento Cinque Stelle (M5S or Five-Star Movement) is the Italian party that more fiercely has disagreed on supporting Ukraine with weapons, both during the Draghi and Meloni executives.⁶ As Bruno (2022b: 168–169; see also Bruno & Cozzolino, 2022; Fazio & Bruno, 2022) has pointed out, until the resignation of Draghi in July 2022, the party led by former PM Giuseppe Conte had, since September 2019, been in an alliance with the PD that saw the two parties form a government (Conte cabinet II), and later supporting the Draghi executive. In this period, the ideological stance of the M5S had seemingly shifted from ambiguous populist positions to pro-EU, moderate and liberal positioning. This shift, strongly supported by at the time foreign minister Luigi Di Maio, seemed to hold firm until the debate on arming Ukraine following Russia's invasion in late February 2022. In fact, the political willingness of the executive branch to arm Ukraine inflamed discussions over defense investments and increases to the country's defense budget. On 21 June, Di Maio quit the M5S: the *casus belli* were indeed the supply of arms to Ukraine and, more generally, Italy's international positioning, namely its support for NATO and recent EU decisions which had, according to Di Maio, been insufficiently supported by the M5S, currently led by Giuseppe Conte. Earlier, in spring 2022, a heated debate among the political forces supporting the government led by Draghi took place. Draghi appeared rather appalled (going as far as to inform Italian President Sergio Mattarella) by the remarks made by Conte, who argued against increasing the Italian defense budget at a point when the country was still grappling with the COVID-19 health crisis and its socio-economic fall-out. Subsequently as we have seen, for various reasons (related both to local situations and Italy's international positioning), a government crisis was triggered, first by the M5S' hesitations and then by Lega and Forza Italia's lack of confidence in the Draghi executive, leading to election in September 2022.

Following the general election of 25 September 2022, the M5S obtained only 15,5% and the beginning of November 2022, Giuseppe Conte stated about the war:

There are citizens marching, telling the Italian government, and others, that we are tired of this strategy, which only envisages military escalation. We want a peace negotiation, a difficult one, to be built, but we must make it. This cry rises loudly from the silent majority

⁶ However, it is important to note that during the parliamentary votes the Movement's MPs voted in favor of sending weapons, following the line of the Draghi cabinet.

of the country. [...] I heard Minister Crosetto saying that the government is preparing to make the sixth arms shipment to Ukraine. The government does not dare to proceed without having consulted parliament, all the more so since it is no longer a government of national unity but a political one (Sole 24 Ore, 2022).

It is therefore possible to say that the Five-Star Movement since the leadership of Conte is increasingly trying, also at the level of narratives, to position itself as a pacifist party, an alternative to center-left PD and attentive to the discontent of Italians who are suffering from inflation due to the energy crisis.

16.5.6 Italia Viva and Azione– Terzo Polo

Italia Viva (Iv), and his leader, Matteo Renzi, have always been in support of Draghi's government, including on military supplies to Kyiv. Former Prime Minister, Renzi has on numerous occasions labeled as crucial the sending of arms to Zelensky, while never ceasing to emphasize the importance of seeking a diplomatic solution. Even his current ally in the Third Pole, the leader of the recently established party Azione, Carlo Calenda, has called the military support of Kyiv "a painful but necessary decision to contain Putin's threat to the West" (Caruso, 2022). The two parties obtained 7.7% of the vote in the latest Italian general election. They campaigned intending to represent the continuation of the "Draghi agenda" (Bruno, 2022b, 169–170) regarding foreign policy. Calenda has often been very critical of other Italian parties, such as the PD and the Five-Star Movement, accusing the former of being internally divided and the latter of wanting Ukraine's surrender to Russia (Cataluddi, 2022; Tag24, 2022).

16.6 Conclusion

In this chapter we have investigated the positioning of the Italian governments concerning the war in Ukraine, both the previous one led by Mario Draghi and the current one led by Giorgia Meloni, leader of Fratelli d'Italia, the main party of the right-wing bloc that won the September 25, 2022, the general election in Italy. Additionally, we have examined the positioning of the other main Italian parties on the Ukraine's "dossier", including military, humanitarian and, more generally, political support for the country led by Zelensky. Regarding the first aspect, the Draghi executive was at the forefront in supporting Ukraine from the start of the conflict on February 24, 2022. At the national, European, and international levels, Draghi went to great lengths to contribute to a cohesive and robust line in favor of Ukraine, even coming under much criticism in Italy. While it is not possible to say that military support for Ukraine and the alleged increase in annual military spending to comply with NATO agreements and to which Italian governments had agreed earlier, were some reasons for the Draghi government crisis, these are certainly among what led

to disagreement with the Five-Star Movement. Concerning the “transition” from the Draghi government to the Meloni government, as we have seen, now, it is not possible to say that there are any differences in Italy’s approach to and positioning of Ukraine. This may be interpreted as a sign of continuity. In fact, during the election campaign and after the election victory, current PM Meloni reiterated that Italy under her government would not represent the weak link between Europeanism and Atlanticism in the West. Regarding the second point (the positioning of the leading Italian parties), we have seen that the party most opposed to sending arms to Ukraine is currently the Five Star Movement, in substantial continuity with (some of) the motivations that contributed to the fall of the Draghi government.

On the other hand, the League and Forza Italia continue to move inconsistently and unevenly, with statements often against sending arms and other support to Ukraine that are then downplayed and/or denied by the official organs of the two parties. This dossier may contribute to future crises within the current governing majority. Fratelli d’Italia, the party that unquestionably emerged as the winner of the September 25 election, has always stated (even at the level of its electoral program) that it wants to continue to support Zelensky’s Ukraine, in substantial continuity with what it has said since the beginning of the conflict. The PD led by Elly Schlein is currently in still “waiting” phase as the PD is, internally, a very divided party. Finally, the Third Pole consisting of the parties of Renzi and Calenda, remains a big supporter of the Draghi agenda and support for Ukraine, including on the level of armaments to be shipped to Kyiv.

To conclude, as far as the “Ukraine dossier” is concerned, the transition between the technocratic national unity government led by Mario Draghi and the right-wing political government led by Giorgia Meloni seems, for the time being, to have taken place under the sign of continuity. However, only the months to come will confirm whether this holds true or not and whether the current alignment will allow the right-wing coalition to persist.

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