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European Union

# Migrants, Italy's “state protection” and Ursula Von Der Leyen's 10 points

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**The arrogant and indecent decision of the Italian government to imitate the mafias that run the Libyan camps, by asking migrants to pay a "state protection" (*pizzo di stato*) of no less than €4,938 to avoid ending up in the Italian camps that Meloni and Piantedosi intend to multiply on the peninsula, sums up the policies of the ruling right wing. [1]**

## Peace with the banks, war on migrants

While the demagogic proposal to tax the billions in super-profits accumulated by the banks on the backs of citizens forced to pay astronomical loan interest (a proposal that had made the gullible believe that the government was on the side of the poorest) has just been cancelled, they want to make money on the backs of migrants. Indeed, the government is aware of the fact that, despite the memoranda signed with dictators, despite the "ten points" issued by the President of the European Union, Ursula Von Der Leyen, despite the threatening messages of the Prime Minister and her ministers, migrants will continue to flow into Italy and Europe.

This extortion, decided on by the government, is supposed to weigh on migrants arriving from "safe countries," i.e., countries where there is no war or restrictions on democratic and human rights. But the question arises, especially for the countries of the South, which countries can be described as "safe"?

The other measures provided for in the new emergency decrees will not solve the so-called emergency and will undermine the rights and human dignity of migrants, but also constitute a new and increasingly serious attack on democracy in our country. Just to mention them:

- the multiplication of Permanent Centres for Repatriation (CPR), their codification into veritable concentration camps ("easy to monitor and placed in areas with very low population density");
- extension of the duration of "administrative detention" to 18 months even for "asylum seekers";
- delegation of the management of the CPRs to the Ministry of Defence, i.e., to the armed forces,
- renewed threat of a "naval blockade" through memoranda and agreements with dictators in countries of origin and transit.

## A fantasized emergency situation

There have been cries of urgency because, in one week, tens of thousands of migrants have arrived in Italy. But let's look at the numbers: according to the most recent data, the total number of people worldwide fleeing persecution, conflict and violence is estimated at 108.5 million. 40% of refugees are children. The countries hosting the largest number of refugees are Turkey, Iran, Colombia, Germany and Pakistan. Three-quarters of the world's refugees are hosted in low- and middle-income countries.

In 2022, there were 880,000 asylum seekers in the European Union and 540,000 in 2021 – less than 1% of the world's refugees and less than 2% of the European population. But, despite the manageable dimensions of the phenomenon, the approach of delicate elections (the European parliament elections next June) is pushing all the governments and institutional parties of the EU to compete to distance themselves from any serious reception policy

and to postpone indefinitely the revision of the Dublin Treaty.

# A racist and classist visa policy

On the other hand, neither the EU nor its member countries have ever considered redefining access policies for "third-country nationals," which have always been marked by explicit racist and discriminatory principles.

Since 2001, the European Visa Regulation (Regulation (EC) No. 539/2001) has listed the countries whose citizens must be in possession of a visa to enter EU countries (crossing the "external borders"), dividing them into a "white list" (countries whose citizens are exempt from the visa requirement) and a "black list" (countries whose citizens are subject to visa requirements and for which the European consular authorities therefore have discretionary powers).

In reality, even this "discretion" is extremely limited and classist because, in practice, it grants visas to non-EU nationals of countries on the "blacklist" only if they can prove that they have assets and income that exclude immigration for business purposes.

Of course, in the EU visa regulation, "race," religion and social class are not explicitly mentioned as criteria for the establishment of both the black- and whitelists. But the discriminatory, racist and classist approach is nevertheless obvious: all African countries (none are excluded) are blacklisted; for Asia, only Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore, Taiwan, East Timor, the United Arab Emirates and Israel are excluded. Religious orientation also has an impact since – with the exception of Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei and the United Arab Emirates – citizens of all Muslim-majority countries are subject to visa requirements, as are all countries with a Hindu or Buddhist majority. And an objective examination of both lists also reveals a strong class correlation with the GDP per capita of different countries, in some ways even stronger than that with skin colour and religious orientation.

On the other hand, in the 22 years since the initial lists were drawn up in 2001, the two lists have been amended only marginally, as, for example, with the modification of the visa waiver list for several Caribbean islands (Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Lucia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago), Mauritius, Seychelles and some Pacific islands (Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu). The "touristic" motivation for these list changes is obvious.

Moreover, it is the very concept of "political refugee" that needs to be reconsidered, by including in the criteria the reasons that often justify the choice to migrate, such as the real lack of economic prospects, devastating environmental insecurity, growing inequalities, elite corruption and so on.

And the racist refrain of "let's help them at home," even assuming this is "in good faith" and provided with adequate funds, structurally clashes with the responsibilities of the former colonizing countries. Didn't the latter entrust their former colonies to leaders who were totally untrustworthy and complicit in the predatory behaviour of neocolonialism, not very different from the direct colonialism of the nineteenth century?

## The EU President's Plan

The ten points of the "European plan" presented by Ursula Von Der Leyen after her visit to Lampedusa in September

do not present any new elements.

Point 1 (the promise of "European aid" to Italy to deal with an invented "emergency") only serves to mask the culpable unpreparedness and demagogic inertia of the Meloni government (which has been denounced by the citizens of Lampedusa).

Point 2 ("stepping up efforts" by the EU to transfer migrants to other destinations, based on the 'voluntary solidarity mechanism') is also a pious intention, explicitly thwarted not only by the sovereignist" countries, but also by other countries that are part of the "EU core".

Point 3 ("Support of Frontex structures for repatriations"), point 4 ("increased actions to fight traffickers"), point 5 ("intensification of air and naval surveillance" by Frontex), point 6 ("concrete actions against traffickers' logistics"), guaranteeing the seizure and destruction of the boats used) are all statements that approach the problem of "traffickers" in a conspiratorial logic, as if the phenomenon of mass migration were a consequence of the actions of traffickers and not the result of the desperation of entire communities of thousands of people ready to do anything to leave.

Point 7 ("Assistance by the staff of the European Asylum Agency" to speed up the examination of applications submitted by migrants by rejecting those that are not substantiated and sending back to their countries of origin those who have submitted them) may be useful in speeding up the scandalous slowness and approximation with which the Italian commissions in charge examine asylum and protection applications, but its effects ultimately depend on whether or not there is a willingness to make a serious reception policy, which is totally belied by the choices made by the Meloni government in recent months.

Point 9 ("Strengthen cooperation with UN agencies" to ensure the protection of migrants also during repatriation) and Point 10 ("implementation of the memorandum with Tunisia") show the EU's total complicity with the refoulement policies that the Italian government would like to implement.

There remains point 8 ("Offering viable alternatives to illegal routes by strengthening humanitarian corridors"), which is perhaps the only novelty of the plan, but which is probably destined to remain a dead letter, in the demagogic context of the electoral campaign and the cynical use of the issue to try to increase the political weight of the various parties.

## The real reasons for government policy

The answer to the question of "migrants" is not only measured in the "humanitarian" field. For the economy of Italian capitalism, the possibility of exploiting a workforce that can be blackmailed because it is "irregular" is an absolutely non-negligible factor of profit. This is the source of the constant opposition to any hypothesis of regularization of migratory flows.

It also has a political "use value." The constant denunciation of a "scapegoat," the recurrent discourse about an "emergency in the face of invasion" contribute to diverting the petty-bourgeois but also popular electorate from the real social problems and the real responsibilities of the ruling classes. They are trying to build consensus around those who want repressive measures to be taken. Measures that in reality will be used not only against migrants, but against everyone.

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We are – and we say this loud and clear – in favour of the immediate granting of residence permits to all and for full freedom of movement to be recognised everywhere.

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[1] Giorgia Meloni, leader of the far-right Fratelli d'Italia (FdI) party, has been President of the Council of Ministers of Italy since 22 October 2022. Matteo Piantedosi, who is close to the Lega, is its interior minister.