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Migration

Italy: is Giorgia Meloni's policy a 'model' for Europe?

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For several decades, Italy has pursued an abject migration policy that flouts human rights and endangers the lives of many people trying to reach Europe. Criminalising movement, restricting the right to asylum, outsourcing border controls, detaining migrants in so-called 'safe' countries: this is the xenophobic policy that Italian prime minister Giorgia Meloni now claims to be setting as a 'model' for other EU countries.

The art of governing by fear

Policies to close borders have become ways of governing through fear of the other, despite their inhuman and ineffective dimension. Fortress Europe has put in place an institutionalised system of spatial and social segregation of non-EU populations. Threatening the principle of equal rights, the ideology of national preference is defended in an increasingly outspoken manner by the extreme European and international right. When it comes to immigration, sovereigntist leaders seem to be very united. This was evident at the meeting organised in Brussels by Meloni, who was also joined by Ursula von der Leyen.

Decades of inhumane policies

In the early 2000s, the 'Bossi-Fini' law (named after the two former Northern League and National Alliance ministers who initiated it as part of Berlusconi's first government) accelerated the process of criminalising migrants considered to be in an irregular situation. Centre-left governments have done no better. In 2017, under Gentiloni, Italy signed an agreement with Libya providing for economic aid and technical support to the Libyan authorities to reduce migratory flows. Refoulement, arbitrary detention, rape and violence: what happens in Libyan detention centres has been abundantly documented under Europe's complicit eyes. A few years later, it was the turn of former Interior Minister Matteo Salvini, now at the helm of a coalition government with the Five Star Movement, to introduce tough sanctions and confiscate rescue ships belonging to humanitarian organisations.

The new 'safe countries' propaganda

For the ruling far right, the propagandistic management of migratory flows, combined with anti-social and freedom-destroying measures, serves to conceal the immobility of the bourgeois economic order. In this area, Meloni has shown herself to be truly anti-migrant.

Decree 20/2023 (cynically referred to as the 'Cutro decree', after the Calabrian village where the tragic shipwreck of migrants occurred in February 2023) severely restricted the right to asylum and broadened the category of migrants who could be expelled, particularly if they came from the list of 'safe countries'. Strongly criticised by legal experts, the 'flow decree' of 2 October re-establishes the right to appeal against decisions on international protection. The rule, recently approved in the decree on the South, provides for the doubling of detention and repatriation centres and extends the detention period from 6 to 18 months for migrants to be repatriated. Signed by the head of state, Sergio Mattarella, the aim of the 'safe countries decree' is to be able to push back the mass of migrants fleeing economic and environmental crises or conditions of exploitation and oppression, while pretending to take

humanitarian rules into account.

In this way, Meloni claims to be repeating the transfers of migrants to Albania, in defiance of the rulings of the Italian courts which, on the basis of the Geneva Convention, reject the mass detention of asylum seekers. Initial investigations into the migrant centres in Albania show that the procedure applied is totally illegitimate: the migrants directed to Albania are sorted on the basis of generic questions such as documents and the declaration of their nationality.

The central Mediterranean remains one of the most dangerous migratory routes in the world. More than 30,000 people have lost their lives there between 2014 and today according to the International Organisation for Migration. The fact that Europe is applauding the measures taken by the Italian government is a worrying signal of the reactionary and authoritarian turn that the old continent seems to be taking in leaps and bounds.

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