

**Country represented: Italy****Council of the EU Europe for Peace:**

"Europe for Peace Plan:

What diplomatic convergence and what European action plans in the main conflicts threatening global stability?

In 1957, the Treaty of Rome gave birth to the EEC, making Italy one of the six "founding members" along with France, West Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. European financial aid contributed to the "Italian economic miracle" of the 1950s-60s-70s, which saw Italians' purchasing power rise rapidly. However, since the 2010s, Italy has been facing a number of difficulties. The country was hit hard by the 2008 financial crisis. Debt levels, which were already very high, increased and more rigorous budgetary policies were demanded by the European institutions, without helping to improve the situation. In 2014-16, Europe was confronted with a serious migratory crisis, with migrants arriving from the Libyan and Tunisian coasts arriving first and foremost in Italy, which is on the front line. A significant proportion of Italian public opinion accused the European institutions of not giving them enough support. A few years later, the COVID 19 pandemic hit Italy hard, and the European institutions were accused once again. It was this growing mistrust of the European Union and migration issues that led to the victory of the government coalition of right-wing and far-right parties led by Giorgia Meloni, who became the 1st woman to be President of the Council. However, she did not call into question the foundations of the European Union, such as the euro or Schengen. This is largely because Italy is heavily in debt and needs European financial aid. In the end, the Meloni government did not really tighten up Italy's migration policy, did not question its military aid to Ukraine and condemned Russian aggression. Finally, NATO membership has not been the subject of discussion either.

In 2019, under the government of Giuseppe Conte, Italy became the first European Union country to fully join the BRI, the Belt and Road Initiative, China's vast infrastructure and investment plan aimed at strengthening its influence in the world. Since then, 18 EU countries have joined, and China is quick to compare their economic results with those of the others. Rome was accused of undermining any hope Europe had of resisting China's economic appetites. In Italy, moreover, the subject never met with unanimous approval: as soon as he came to power in 2021, Mario Draghi had the agreement frozen. On 6 December 2023, the Italian government officially announced that Italy would not renew the 2019 memorandum of understanding concerning its formal participation in the BRI. This decision effectively withdraws Italy from President Xi Jinping's flagship diplomatic initiative first announced ten years ago. Through BIS, China has become a major international lender and has financed numerous infrastructure projects, mainly in developing countries, which has caused controversy in China and other countries associated with the programme.

Italy condemns in the strongest terms Russia's unprovoked and unjustified aggression against Ukraine, which constitutes a flagrant violation of international law and humanitarian principles. Italy underlines its unwavering support for the territorial integrity, full sovereignty and independence of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders, as well as its proactive engagement in the Euro-Atlantic community's efforts to support Ukraine. Italy also fully supports Ukraine's European path and actively contributed to the granting of EU candidate status to Kiev and the decision to open negotiations. It has also put in place a strategy aimed at gradually replacing the annual supply of 29 billion cubic metres of gas from

Russia with increased supplies (via pipelines and LNG) from existing sources. Italy will play a central role in the reconstruction of Ukraine by chairing the G7 in 2024 and hosting the Ukraine Recovery Conference in 2025. Their commitment to the recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine led to the organisation of the bilateral conference in Rome on 26 April 2023, attended by representatives of the Italian and Ukrainian governments and senior IFI management. The Conference provided an opportunity to meet nearly a thousand Italian and Ukrainian companies from the infrastructure and transport, energy and environment, steel, agri-food, health, space and avionics, IT and services sectors. Under the coordination of the MOFA Working Group for the Recovery and Reconstruction of Ukraine, a committee made up of national companies, institutions and associations meets regularly. On 2 October, the committee met online on the occasion of the visit of VPM/Foreign Affairs Minister Antonio Tajani to Kiev, with more than 180 participants. A bilateral business forum with Italian and Ukrainian companies will be held in spring 2024 in Ukraine, as a follow-up to this very successful forum. Recently, Giorgia Meloni said that if Russia had not invaded Ukraine, it is highly likely that Hamas would not have launched such an attack on Israel.

On this subject, the Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs stated that supporting Israel, as Italy does, does not mean being against Palestine or the Palestinian people. He added: They are victims of Hamas, which uses them as human shields: Israel tells them to get out, the terrorists force them to stay. We say no to terrorism, to evil, to the horrific images we have seen. But we are obviously working to achieve definitive stabilisation in the Middle East.