

## How Greens Plan to Survive Italy's Right-Wing Government

Article by Eleonora Evi

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After 14 years of absence from the Italian parliament, the Greens are back. But as a small force against a right-wing majority, they face an uphill battle for progressive changes. We asked Europa Verde's Co-leader Eleonora Evi how the Greens plan to emerge as a stronger force.

**Green European Journal: The Greens are back in the Italian parliament after years of absence. What value do Greens bring to parliament? And what are their priority issues this term?**

**Eleonora Evi:** It has been 14 years since the Greens were last in the Italian Parliament. This important comeback was made possible by the Greens and Left Alliance (*Alleanza Verdi e Sinistra*), which is so much more than the sum of two parties, Europa Verde (Green Europe) and Italian Left (*Sinistra Italiana*). It is a project that includes parties such as Possible (*Possibile*), many civic networks, and local organisations. We are looking to expand and grow in strength in time for the upcoming elections.

This broad coalition responds to two big challenges of our time: climate and social justice. They are the two pillars of a political engagement that must be carried out across all areas of our society, from the economy to day-to-day lives. We bring freshness to Italian politics despite being the smallest group in parliament.

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We are going to push for an ecological transition that goes beyond safeguarding and protecting the environment. Our ecological transition agenda envisions a wholesale revolution of all aspects of our society, from health, environment, to rights and work. We are already giving special attention to all these areas. The very concept of co-spokesperson, man and woman at all levels, is an important mark of distinction, showing our dedication to the battles for women's rights, feminism and eco-feminism which is increasingly a central theme.

Italy's right-wing government is taking the country backwards on several fronts, including by committing to use more fossil fuel. It is concerning that the government has approved drilling in the Adriatic, and Prime Minister Meloni continues to meet with African leaders in an effort to turn Italy into a major gas hub. We want to demonstrate that only by breaking free from the fossil fuel system will we be able to combat the climate problem and prepare for the ecological transition. This is a very challenging and cultural battle.

**With a government that enjoys a very strong parliamentary majority and a centre-right that keeps winning, as recently happened in the regional elections in Lazio and Lombardy, the opposition**

**has much to gain by banding together. What kind of relationship does Europa Verde have with the rest of the Italian progressive parties and other opposition groups?**

Europa Verde, and the Greens and Left Alliance have always worked hard to keep the progressive left united during national and regional election campaigns. But progressives in Lombardy and Lazio were divided, handing victory to the right.

Unlike other parties and politicians, we have rejected political opportunism in favour of building a united progressive force for specific issues. Aside from our commitment to a united left, we stand out for our consistency.

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Now that we are in opposition, we must work even harder on keeping the progressive left united. There are already many areas on which we can work together, such as the minimum wage, on which all the opposition parties have already made proposals and proposed motions. I am also thinking of civil rights. We have a duty to fight for the rights of all the children of LGBTQ couples and families who could face the worst consequences of social regression. On these issues, the current government follows the example of Poland or Hungary, instead of countries such as Spain where rights are advancing. In any case, yes, I believe there is a lot of room to work together.

**Speaking of progressive forces, you tweeted about your support for Elly Schlein's before the Partito Democratico (PD) primaries. How will your relationship with the PD change after Schlein's victory?**

I have great confidence in the PD's new leadership. I hope that under Elly Schlein leadership, the PD can make its mark in the ecological battle, and show strength despite the government moving in the opposite direction. I have great confidence in the PD's new leadership. Of course, I am also very realistic; I know that it is a very broad party, with various opposing tendencies and currents. I hope the new leader will not let herself be overwhelmed by the traditional dynamics, which could obstruct the drive for change. I hope that despite the differences in party identities, we can work together to be more impactful on today's challenges.

**Mobilisation around environmental issues seems to be growing in Italy today. Ultima Generazione in particular is a very active organisation. Can this activism rooted in Fridays for Future be a potential path for Europa Verde? How do you plan to speak to those who take to the streets for the climate?**

As a first thought, I think it is important not to politicise the activism of young people taking to the streets. The young people of Fridays For Future and Ultima Generazione must be free to engage in their activism outside of political framings. But it is also true that their action must move politics, and lead political parties to reflect on their demands, which often remain ignored. This happens because we focus on the gesture itself, without understanding what the underlying message is. At this moment in history, the actions of activists remain very important, and we as Europa Verde continually try to listen and get in touch with them, with a series of meetings and ideas to establish common proposals.

But we don't just want to listen. Our goal is to interpret their demands through our political action within the institutions. Unfortunately, with a populist government in power, it is more difficult to address these demands in a scientific manner. Whenever changes to the productive sectors are raised, the government resorts to distorted and alarmist narratives. The parliamentary majority has constructed a completely distorted narrative based on fear and lies about European regulation aiming to ban combustion engine cars by 2035, and the EPBD directive on the energy efficiency of buildings.

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In this extremely complicated context, the demands and actions of Fridays For Future, Extinction Rebellion, and Last Generation are even more valuable in bringing the political system to do more listening.

**Speaking of the younger generation, a YouTrend poll showed that in the last general election, the Greens and Left Alliance obtained 8 per cent of the vote in the under-24 demographic, compared to an overall result of 3.6 per cent. Looking at this result, do you think that there is much potential among younger people for you and the environmental movement more generally? How do you plan to speak to the youth electorate?**

Knowing that there is a segment of young people who look at the Greens and Left Alliance with attention is a source of great hope and encouragement for us. Working to increasingly intercept the vote and political participation of young people is fundamental. One of the proposals we are working on is the vote for out-of-towners, a potentially profound, civilisational battle that would bring the vote to many young university students and workers who are currently disenfranchised. Along with Cyprus and Malta, Italy is currently the last country in the European Union not to guarantee a form of distance voting for out-of-towners. We have been active on this since the beginning of this legislature, and we hope to find support from members of both the opposition and the majority.

In our opinion this is a necessary action. We cannot complain about the rampant and growing abstentionism in Italy if young people who want to vote are deprived of their right to do so. But beyond focusing on political participation by guaranteeing rights where they do not exist, we also think about other innovations and instruments that make active participation in political life more effective, such as petitions. Today it is thought that young people are not interested in politics, but this is not true. The problem is that very often young people feel ignored in and excluded from the spaces of democratic participation. It is up to politics to try to fill this void.

**The European election next year will be another big challenge for you. What is your idea of Europe and which policies do you want to promote both within the European green family and in the institutions? Where do European institutions need to do more?**

Europa Verde is working with the European Green family on common demands and improving existing ones. An important issue and long-standing fight for Greens is opposing the idea of a fortress Europe enclosed by borders and walls. We want migration management to be based on solidarity, shared responsibility, and expanded access to legal routes. We are fighting for a European Union that rejects the Italian government's other member states' nationalist approach.

We want to work towards an EU that gives greater relevance to social issues following the historic step forward that Next Generation EU represents. The possibility of a common debt can change European social policies from the ground up. We hope that the experience of the Recovery Fund will become something structural and long-term, for a Europe of genuine solidarity.

Then there is the battle of ecological transition. To date, this European Commission has taken steps in the right direction, such as the Green Deal proposal, which includes the Fit For 55 package, and the greater attention on nature and biodiversity conservation. However, loopholes and backward steps must be avoided at all costs, and this is unfortunately already happening, to some extent. One example is the inclusion of gas and nuclear in the EU taxonomy for green finance. There is the same risk in the new Net Zero Industry Act that has just been passed, where a loophole allows the nuclear route as a way to achieve climate neutrality. We are absolutely opposed to this.

Reforming the agricultural sector is another important area for Europa Verde. We, as European Greens, have been the only ones to strongly oppose maintaining a model that rewards the large intensive and industrial agricultural enterprise with public funds. Public money has financed the gigantism that aims to maximise profit at the expense of labour, rights and the quality of the food on our tables. We want to see a model that is sustainable and dignified for those working in the sector. We believe in a model of agriculture that abandons intensive farming and the excessive use of pesticides. On all these issues I have mentioned, Europe is still acting timidly. Important battles demanding hard work lie ahead of us.



Eleonora Evi is an Italian politician, co-spokesperson of Green Europe since July 2021. She has served as MEP between 2014 and 2022, before being elected for the Chamber of Deputies within the Green and Left Alliance.

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