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Normalising “Remigration”: A Far-Right Playbook

Article by Antonia Ferri
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In just a few years, support for “remigration” – an illegal project to deport migrants, refugees and citizens who are deemed “unassimilated” – has moved from the fringes to the fore of political discourse. In Italy, this dynamic has been enabled by collaboration between the far right in government and extra-parliamentary groups. How to resist the normalisation of extremist ideas when the debate keeps shifting further to the right?

Around 500 far-right politicians, activists, and influencers gathered in Porto last May for the second edition of the “Remigration Summit”. The first had been held a year earlier in Gallarate, not far from Milan. In April this year, Milan also hosted the demonstration “Fearless! In Europe, we are masters in our own home”, organised by the European far-right party Patriots for Europe. In June, a pro-remigration march took place in Rome, reportedly attended by around 4000 people. Two weeks later, on 30 June, the “Comitato Remigrazione e Riconquista” (“Remigration and Reconquest Committee”) filed a citizen initiative bill on remigration, collecting over 130,000 signatures (well above the 50,000 required).

All of these initiatives reflect the growing popularity of “remigration”, which, according to the summit’s promoters, aims to “prevent population replacement through the reversal of migratory flows, thereby restoring the sovereignty, independence, and identity of countries, through the defense of their ethnocultural specificity.” In practice, remigration means the mass expulsion of irregular migrants, but also asylum seekers, refugees, and other legal migrants and citizens deemed “unassimilated” into the dominant culture – that is, people who are non-white and Muslim.

From the fringes to the institutions

The Remigration and Reconquest Committee brings together various strands of the extra-parliamentary, anti-democratic, and neo-fascist far right, including CasaPound (whose members have proudly called themselves “the fascists of the third millennium”), Veneto Fronte Skinheads, Brescia ai bresciani, and the Rete dei patrioti. But remigration has also been popularised by prominent figures within the institutional Right, particularly the League.

Led by Transport Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini, the League is the second-largest force in the three-party governing coalition. It remains a key player in regional politics in Northern Italy, but has in recent years lost many of its supporters to Giorgia Meloni’s Brothers of Italy. In an attempt to stem its losses, the League has increasingly radicalised on identity issues.

So far, this strategy hasn’t worked. In February, Roberto Vannacci – an army general elected to the European Parliament with the League in 2024 – left the League to found a new party, Futuro Nazionale (“National Future”). Vannacci, who has been criticised for his homophobic, racist, and fascism-revisionist statements, is among the staunchest supporters of remigration, and accuses the government and the League of being too moderate and too willing to compromise. National Future is currently polling above 7 per cent, ahead of the League and just behind Forza Italia, the junior coalition partner.

Although remigration remains, for now, a minority project, its political rise has already created a climate of tension. In January, for example, during a press event at the Chamber of Deputies for the launch of the popular-initiative bill on remigration, a member of Rete dei patrioti handed a fake plane ticket to journalist Youssef Hassan Holgado, who is of Spanish and Egyptian origin. “I was there as a journalist and was given a ticket to ‘remigrate’ to my country of origin,” recounts Hassan Holgado. “As a journalist, I have the rhetorical tools to defend myself against accusations and attacks. But that gesture is an insult to all the people of foreign origin who might not have the tools to defend themselves against this barbarity.”

The press conference, organised by League MP Domenico Furgiuele, was later cancelled after dozens of opposition lawmakers occupied the chamber, singing the anti-fascist anthem “Bella ciao” and holding up copies of the Italian constitution. In April, the 32 MPs who had taken part in the protest were suspended for blocking the event. In June, Furgiuele left the League to join National Future.

Both in Italy and Germany, […] provisions stipulate that no one may be stripped of their citizenship on political grounds. Born from the resolve never to repeat Nazi and fascist persecutions, these principles are now being challenged across Europe.

Racism and conspiracy theories

Italy, with two far-right parties in government, represents an important laboratory for the European Right. But the movement to normalise remigration as a political project dates back much further. One of its ideological antecedents is the theory of ethnopluralism, advanced by French thinkers from the Nouvelle Droite and the Research and Study Group for European Civilisation (GRECE), founded in 1968 by Alain de Benoist. Rejecting universalism – the idea that all people share a common human worth – ethnopluralism legitimises a form of apartheid based not on explicit racism, but on the idea that peoples have fundamental, unbridgeable differences, and must therefore live in separate ethno-cultural regions.

“The ideological core [of remigration] is nativism, the idea that nation-states should be populated by natives,” says Mattia Zulianello, Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Trieste and an expert on populism, radicalism, and political extremism. He explains nativism splits into three strands: “Economic nativism holds that immigrants steal jobs from natives; welfare chauvinism claims migrants drain resources without contributing; and symbolic nativism sees migrants – especially Muslim migrants – as a threat to traditions and customs.”

Linked to these ideas is also the conspiracy theory of the “Great Replacement” articulated by another French writer and intellectual, Renaud Camus. In his 2011 book *Le grand remplacement*, Camus argues that mass immigration into Europe is part of a plan to end white European civilisation. Camus’s racism is also steeped in antisemitism: he claims a “globalist elite” made up of Jewish political and financial figures, along with the progressive world, is carrying out the transnational design of the “Great Replacement”.

Leonardo Bianchi, a journalist, writer, and author of the newsletter *Complotti!* (“Conspiracies”), argues that the conspiratorial and ideological dimension lies at the heart of remigration as a political proposal: “It

isn't just about expelling migrants, but above all about stripping civil rights from citizens deemed 'unassimilated', meaning those who hold European passports but, in the movement's own terms, aren't 'native' – that is, not white and not Christian.

Jean-Marie Le Pen, founder of the far-right Front National, helped spread Camus's ideas. In his book *Mémoires*, he claimed that the "Great Replacement" is a fact and that the white world is dying. Over the years, Camus's theory spread across Europe and reached the United States through the "alt-right" movement. It also inspired the perpetrators of terrorist, xenophobic massacres, such as the 2019 Christchurch attack in New Zealand.

Parties and influencers

The vocabulary of remigration emerged alongside the spread of Camus's ideas. According to Zulianello, the first movements to talk about remigration, in the Netherlands and Belgium, were classic extreme-right groups: skinheads and ultras of varying degrees of extremism. But the idea initially had little traction.

Among institutional political actors, Geert Wilders (the Eurosceptic and Islamophobic founder of the Party for Freedom in the Netherlands) and the Flemish nationalist party Vlaams Belang ("Flemish Interest") were among the first to adopt the term between 2011 and 2012. Following the 2015 refugee crisis, the discourse on migration shifted rightward, and parties like Fidesz in Hungary began spreading Camus's theories. As recently as 2022, during his inauguration speech for his fourth and final term as prime minister, Viktor Orbán said: "I see the great European population exchange as a suicidal attempt to replace the lack of European, Christian children with adults from other civilisations – migrants."

In Denmark too, the idea that migrants were siphoning off social resources meant for native citizens took hold in the political agenda. "Welfare chauvinism originated with the Dansk Folkeparti ["Danish People's Party"], which then prompted other parties to follow suit, as they sought to replicate successful strategies," says Zulianello. The theme later spread across various far-right parties in Europe. "The current wave owes to Alternative für Deutschland".

On 25 November 2023, AfD members, businesspeople, entrepreneurs, doctors, fraternity members, and even some figures from the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) gathered at a hotel on Lake Lehnitz, near Potsdam. Martin Sellner, an Austrian neo-fascist ideologue and influencer, set out the strategy needed to normalise remigration, a long-term project meant to unfold over decades. He also spoke of a "model city" in North Africa where two million people would be relocated (that is, deported). The parallels with the Nazi plan to deport four million Jews to Madagascar are clear. The Potsdam meeting was meant to remain secret, but it was exposed by the independent investigative outlet *Correctiv*.

"This theory isn't harmless," Bianchi comments. "As a project, it undermines the constitutions of European countries, which are founded on the fundamental principles of the post-World War II era. Both in Italy, under Article 22, and in Germany, under Article 16, these provisions stipulate that no one may be stripped of their citizenship on political grounds." Born from the resolve never to repeat Nazi and fascist persecutions, these principles are now being challenged across Europe: by Chega in Portugal, Vox in Spain, and Reform UK in the United Kingdom.

According to Zulianello, Europe's radical right has also influenced its American counterpart, which in turn has helped mainstream the idea of remigration. After Elon Musk's 2023 acquisition of Twitter, violent content circulated more freely, giving greater visibility to figures like Sellner. A report by the Center for

the Study of Organized Hate found a spike of 71000 mentions of the term “remigration” on X between 1 and 8 September 2025, following coordinated posts from Musk himself and other prominent far-right figures, such as Dutch influencer Eva Vlaardingerbroek.

Donald Trump, too, has invoked and carried out expulsions of migrants, explicitly using the term “remigration” on the official channels of the Department of Homeland Security. But according to Zulianello, the real driving force behind this movement remains Europe.

“What’s interesting about the Italian case,” says Zulianello, “is that the proposal didn’t originate from a party, but from a far-right network – the Comitato Remigrazione e Riconquista”. As Bianchi points out, the Committee’s proposal “follows Martin Sellner’s plan to the letter, which sets out three steps: the deportation of irregular migrants, the restriction of the right to asylum and family reunification (which are also long-standing causes championed by the League), and voluntary remigration, which is anything but voluntary and targets all so-called ‘non-assimilated’ people.”

The citizen initiative bill submitted in June aims to “regulate” migratory flows in order to combat irregular migration and exploitation. It proposes establishing a national “remigration Programme” to crack down on NGOs (allegedly “involved in migrant trafficking”), reduce flows of foreign workers, encourage the “return of Italian descendants”, and create a fund to boost Italy’s birth rate. These measures would be financed through a “remigration fund” of 500 million euros per year, raised through NGO asset seizures, a tax on remittances, and funds currently allocated to asylum policy. However, the proposal’s central problem isn’t economic but legal and constitutional: remigration openly violates the anti-fascist principles of the Italian Constitution and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

According to Zulianello, the initiative’s promoters “know that the proposal as it is is simply not feasible. What matters to them is getting the issue onto the agenda. By mainstreaming certain topics, the space for debate widens, and mainstream parties tend to want to fill that vacuum, effectively legitimising the issue and hardening anti-immigration policies.”

The effects are already visible. A security package approved in April included an amendment that offered financial rewards to lawyers who successfully carried out voluntary repatriation procedures for migrants. Legal controversy over the measure later forced the government to amend it.

Resisting normalisation

Tickets to the Remigration Summit in Porto cost between 45 and 325 euros – a price justified by the stakes, according to the organisers: “With remigration, Europe will become more European day by day. Without remigration, it will become less European every day and will eventually cease to exist.” But the Europe imagined by remigration’s supporters – which is moving closer to the mainstream, also thanks to the cooperation between the centre-right and the far-right in the European Parliament – isn’t the only possible Europe. Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union states that “The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities.”

According to Bianchi, opposing remigration and the “Great Replacement” conspiracy theory means, above all, refusing to allow their normalisation as “common sense” proposals. “The term ‘remigration’ sounds neutral because it comes from the social sciences, but it’s an act of linguistic normalisation: its meaning and its origins are inseparable from the political project behind it.”



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