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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

# Russian Embassy Highlights Italian Ties Ahead Of Vote

By AFP

September 22, 2022



Vladimir Putin and Silvio Berlusconi, 2010. **Maxim Shemetov / TASS**

A sign of diplomatic ties or brazen trolling: three days before Italy's elections, the Russian embassy tweeted photos Thursday of almost all the main party leaders with President Vladimir Putin.

"From the recent history of relations between Russia and Italy. We have some memories," the embassy wrote, at the end of a campaign where the Ukraine war and Italy's ties with Moscow have taken center stage.

The only major party leader not included in the photos was far-right leader Giorgia Meloni, whose party is tipped to come top in general elections on Sunday.

One photo showed Putin and former Italian premier Silvio Berlusconi leaning towards each other, while another portrayed Putin shaking hands with a smiling Enrico Letta, leader of the

center-left Democratic Party.

Another showed Putin standing between anti-immigration League leader Matteo Salvini — a long-standing Putin admirer — former premier Giuseppe Conte, now head of the populist Five Star Movement, and ex-Five Star leader Luigi Di Maio, Italy's current foreign minister.

The last photo showed Putin smiling while shaking hands with former prime minister Matteo Renzi, now leading a centrist party — though Renzi looks a little uncomfortable.

Italy's current government led by Prime Minister Mario Draghi has been strongly supportive of Western sanctions against Moscow over the war in Ukraine.

Meloni has backed the measures, and the sending of weapons to Kyiv, but is fighting the election as part of a right-wing alliance alongside Salvini and Berlusconi.

Salvini has been highly critical of the sanctions, saying they are harming Europe and Italy more than Moscow.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/09/22/russian-embassy-highlights-italian-ties-ahead-of-vote-a78870