



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

# The strengthening of the right in Europe increases the chances of success for the Italian-Albanian model



Italy and Albania have once again delayed the planned August 1 opening of centres for the reception of migrants on Albanian territory but under Italian legal jurisdiction.

The previous deadline for the start of work for the two centres in Albania was May 20, but it was postponed to the beginning of August. The reasons for this are technical and financial, but not essential. The Italian-Albanian model for managing the flow of migrants and asylum seekers is therefore still of significant interest to other European governments.

Since the prime ministers of the two countries, Giorgia Meloni and Edi Rama, **signed** an agreement on the opening of the centres last November, the model has caused a lot of controversy.

Both international humanitarian organisations and the opposition in Italy have criticised this solution. The former mainly criticised it on humanitarian grounds and in terms of international law, while opposition politicians in Italy called it an expensive and ineffective project.

Two centres in Albania, built with Italian money and under Italian jurisdiction, will be able to accommodate about 3,000 migrants per month, or about 36,000 per year.

This is around a quarter of the total number of illegal migrants who reached Italy in 2023 (around 156,000). However, these figures fluctuate, so that in the first six months of this year there were even 60% fewer illegal migrants entering Italy than in the same six months of the previous year.

According to Italian **Minister** of Interior Matteo Piantedosi, the large decline in illegal entries is "due to the government's action to combat shameful migrant trafficking while enforcing stricter migration rules."

However, this decline will not hinder the joint project with Albania, where Italy will outsource a large number of asylum seekers until the procedure is finalised in accordance with their applications.

## Changed political landscape

From the outset, international humanitarian organisations were of the opinion that this solution was detrimental to migrants and that it violated international conventions protecting their rights.

"It is high time that European institutions recognise that the Italy-Albania agreement would create an unlawful and harmful system, which must be stopped. Instead of increasing people's suffering, the authorities should ensure access to an effective asylum procedure, adequate reception, and safe, regular routes," **stated** Amnesty International last February, when the Italian Parliament ratified the agreement with Albania.

However, the political landscape in Europe will look very different when the centres in Albania are completed and when they receive the first asylum seekers in Italy than it did when the project was launched at the end of last year.

In the meantime, several European countries, into which large numbers of undocumented migrants are attempting to enter, have either right-wing governments or tightened existing regulations on asylum and the reception of migrants under the electoral influence of the right. This political shift to the right also means greater sympathy across Europe for the Italian-Albanian project.

### Many European governments have been observing the Italian-Albanian project

France tightened its immigration regulations at the beginning of the year. This was partly a political manoeuvre by the centrist government to win the sympathy of the moderate right ahead of the European Parliament elections last June.

The motive for tightening the regulations was also the steady increase in the number of asylum seekers, which stood at around 142,000 in France in 2023, i.e., 9% more than in 2022.

With an **estimated** 50,000 to 78,500 asylum applications by the end of the year, the right-wingers in the Netherlands have recently come to power with the intention of tightening the rules on migrant entry and asylum granting.

Many European governments have been observing the Italian-Albanian project, viewing it as an experiment that will determine whether they align their own national policies on undocumented migrants with it.

## Support from influential countries

Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni considers this model to be one of the most important instruments for implementing her policy of combating illegal immigration that brought her to power and, at the same time, recommends it to her European partners.

"The agreement could be replicated in many countries and become part of the EU's structural solution to the migration crisis," she **said** during her recent stay in Albania, where she also visited future centres.



*This serves as an example of out-of-the-box thinking, based on fair sharing of responsibilities with third countries - Ursula von der Leyen*

Since Italy and Albania concluded the agreement at the end of last year, they have received support from the head of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, who described it as an "important initiative" at the time.

"This serves as an example of out-of-the-box thinking, based on fair sharing of responsibilities with third countries in line with obligations under EU and international law," wrote Von der Leyen to EU leaders last December.

In the meantime, she overcame an important obstacle in the European Parliament elections last June and subsequently obtained another mandate at the head of the European Commission, so that her support for the Italian-Albanian project is now even more important.

According to German Interior Minister Nancy Feaser's announcements, her government may be the next to apply the Italian-Albanian experience.

She described it as an "interesting model" and stated that her government has been investigating the legal aspects of asylum procedures in third countries and searching for a possible partner for such a project.

"Italy wants to handle asylum procedures in Albania itself. This is an interesting model that I am discussing with my Italian counterpart," she told Stern.

In light of the imminent start of the reception of Italian asylum seekers in the Albanian centres, the resistance of the left-wing opposition and international humanitarian organisations will not subside.

However, the political climate in Europe, where the Italian-Albanian experiment will begin, is far more favourable to such a solution than it was less than a year ago, when it was launched.

Given the recent strengthening of the right-wing in the European elections, governments will seek to implement their demands for a stricter migration policy, including within the EU.

In this respect, there is a good chance that other countries in Europe, particularly those with the largest influx of migrants and asylum seekers, will apply the Italian-Albanian model.