

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni of Italy
July 27, 2023

President Biden. Well, it's a delight to welcome the Prime Minister. We have become friends. And it's good to have you back at the White House. Thank you for coming.

Prime Minister Meloni. Thank you.

President Biden. And let me offer my condolences over the—in Italy and throughout the Mediterranean, to those suffering from extreme, extreme weather and wildfires. Italy and the region are grappling with this, just as we are here in the United States.

I just did a major initiative on the dangers of this excessive heat here in the United States. And we're grappling with it as well.

And as NATO allies, the transatlantic partnership is the cornerstone of our shared security. And the Italian troops are playing a critical role in Europe, in the Mediterranean, and beyond.

Italy and the United States are also standing strong with Ukraine. And I compliment you on your very strong support in defending against Russian atrocities. And that's what they are. It's not just a war, but they're—Russia is committing atrocities that they're focusing on. Well, I don't want to get into it.

But you know—and I thank the Italian people. I want to thank them for supporting you in supporting Ukraine. It makes a big difference.

Today we're going to talk about our deepening economic connections, which fueled more than \$100 billion in trade last year. In my view, there's no reason why that can't increase. And we're also expanding the partnership in new areas, including space cooperation and strengthening our support for developing countries. And I look forward to our discussion today on Mediterranean—the work with Mediterranean nations to address the legitimate migration challenges you have coming in from Africa.

And Italy is going to be leading the G-7 this next time around and—next year. And I also look forward to pursuing an ambitious agenda for progress. And I hope you'll be nice to me as the chairman. [Laughter]

Thank you.

Prime Minister Meloni. Thank you.

President Biden. Please.

Prime Minister Meloni. Thank you. I am very pleased to be here today to testify the deep friendship that bonds the United States and Italy. I want to thank President Biden for his hospitality. And this closeness is based on common values and cultural roots.

And our bond was made strong by the contribution of millions of Americans of Italian origin. And that means Italy is an integral part of the great American nation and contributed in shaping its culture and identity.

And also for that, our relations are historically strong. They cross governments and remain solid regardless of their political colors.

We know who our friends are in times that are tough. And I think that Western nations have shown that they can rely on each other much than some have believed.

Moreover, after the Russian aggression against Ukraine, for all together we decided to defend the international law. And I'm proud that Italy, from the beginning, played its part in it. We did it simply because supporting Ukraine means defending the peaceful coexistence of people and states everywhere in the world.

Contrary to what some claim, Ukrainian resistance distances a world war. It does not bring it closer, as some say. Those who believe in peace should be the first supporters of the Ukrainian cause.

And then, Italy and the United States have important common interests in enhancing, as well, a global trade that is not only free, but also fair. Competition from other nations that do not meet our standards in terms of worker protection, safety, environmental protection undermine our companies and workers.

So free trade without rules has shown its limits. We must find the right balance between openness and the protection of our economy—economies and strategic interests.

And similarly, we will discuss also these within the West. We must work together to support our industrial system by fostering convergence on our national interests. In this respect, dialogue between us—between Italy, Europe, United States—can avoid counterproductive tension to the benefit of everyone.

And on the other hand, we also need to be fair with nations that feel they have been exploited of their resources and that they show distrust towards the West. President Biden knows I take care a lot about Africa, about the role that we can play in these countries that can help us, building with them a new relation based on a new approach, which is a peer-to-peer approach. Also to fight illegal migration and all the problems that we face.

It's all things that we will discuss in the G-7 Presidency of Italy next year.

And then, United States is our most important trade partner outside European Union. And I think—I do agree with you, Joe—that our trade partnership is very high, but no reason why we could not improve it.

So thank you very much for hosting us, and thank you for your time.

President Biden. Well, I think you made an interesting point about the closeness and how many Italian Americans there are here.

And I just want you to know I was raised in a neighborhood where I felt self-conscious my name didn't end in "o." And I want you to know I'm the only non-Italian named Man of the Year by the Italian Society.

And I—when I got the award, I said to everybody what—[inaudible]—wanted to know what I was going to say. I said, "You know, I was thinking about this." I named all the guys and families I grew up with—[inaudible]. Anyway, I went through the list. And I said: "I was thinking about it. I deserve this award." [Laughter]

And—but I may be Irish, but I'm not stupid. I married Dominic Giacoppo's granddaughter. Just want you to know that. Okay? So be nice to me. All right? [Laughter]

Prime Minister Meloni. Now I know it.

President Biden. Anyway, thank you all very much.

Prime Minister Meloni. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:16 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

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