

Italy

DS6901 250901 Meloni backs return of nuclear power to cut carbon emissions

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Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's rightwing government is planning to reintroduce nuclear energy 35 years after the country shut down its last atomic plant, in a bid to lower the country's carbon emissions.

Environment and energy security minister Gilberto Pichetto Fratin told the Financial Times that Rome plans to introduce legislation to enable investments in small modular nuclear reactors, which could be operational within 10 years.

Atomic power should account for at least 11 per cent of the country's total electricity consumption by 2050, he said, as Italy seeks to reduce its reliance on imported fossil fuels.

"To have a guarantee of continuity on clean energy, we must insert a quota of nuclear energy," the minister said.

Renewable technologies, such as solar and wind power, "cannot provide the security that we need", he argued, reflecting his government's scepticism towards these technologies.

Italy built four nuclear power stations in the 1960s and 1970s and had planned an ambitious expansion of its nuclear power capacity. But, after the 1986 Chernobyl disaster in the Soviet Union, Italians voted overwhelmingly in a national referendum to end subsidies for the development of new reactors.

Amid the surge of anti-nuclear sentiment, Italy then decided to shut down all its existing nuclear power plants, the last of which closed in 1990.

Two decades later, then-prime minister Silvio Berlusconi attempted to restart Italy's nuclear programme, pass-

ing a new law and working up contracts for the construction of new reactors. But his attempt was derailed by a 2011 referendum in which more than 90 per cent of voters rejected the plan.

In a recent survey commissioned by Legambiente, a leading Italian environmental group, 75 per cent of the 1,000 respondents expressed scepticism that nuclear power was a solution to Italy's energy woes, with 25 per cent staunchly opposed on safety grounds. But 37 per cent said nuclear power could help Italy if the technology was safer.

Pichetto Fratin said he was confident that Italians' historic "aversion" to nuclear power could be overcome, given that the newest technology has "different levels of safety and benefits families and businesses".

He said the past referendums are not an impediment to the Meloni government pushing new laws to facilitate a nuclear power restart. Italy has also retained a "high competence" in the sector, he said, with cutting-edge research institutions and Italian enterprises active in the nuclear supply chain in foreign markets.

"It's a matter of perception, awareness," he said. "Young people are more aware, the elderly less so. They are of the Chernobyl generation and when they hear talk of nuclear power . . . they automatically say no."

The Meloni government's nuclear push comes as it has imposed new restrictions on the rollout of solar power, with the prime minister warning that the proliferation of photovoltaic panels threatens Italy's food security.

Many Italians are also complaining that photovoltaics are spoiling the view of the picturesque Italian countryside.

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La Meloni favorevole al ritorno del nucleare per tagliare le emissioni di CO2

