

The great excuse: How Renzi could exploit the UK's EU deal

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The conclusion of the UK's renegotiation has obvious implications for British party politics, but what impact has the deal had on domestic politics in other EU countries? [Bruno Marino](#) and [Nicola Martocchia Diodati](#) write on reactions to the deal in Italy. They state that while the response has been mixed among Italian parties, Matteo Renzi is likely to view the deal as an opportunity to push for European concessions over the ongoing migration crisis.



David Cameron, in [his statement](#) after the renegotiation he had conducted of Britain's EU membership, stated that the UK will never be part of an 'ever closer union' and will never be part of the Eurozone. According to several other European leaders, including Dalia Grybauskaitė, the [President of Lithuania](#), the drama is now over at the European level and it is time for the British electorate to decide whether or not to back the deal at the ballot box. But is this really the case? Concerning Italian politics, at least, the drama is definitely still continuing.



In Italy, the immediate reaction to the news of Cameron's deal was extremely varied, with Italian parties responding to the deal in different ways. Roberto Gualtieri, a Member of the European Parliament for the [Partito Democratico](#) (PD), and one of the 'sherpas' facilitating the negotiations, described the deal as a 'win-win' situation for the UK and the EU. According to Gualtieri, the UK had simply formally obtained the terms of membership that it had already established prior to the renegotiation to a large extent. Meanwhile, the European Court of Justice would still have the power to interpret EU treaties as they relate to the UK.



Conversely, the reaction from Beppe Grillo's [Movimento Cinque Stelle](#) (M5S) has been markedly less positive. [Marco Zanni](#), one of the party's MEPs, characterised the outcome as a bad deal, noting that the EU has simply become an 'intergovernmental treaty' in all but name, and citing a potential domino effect which could deconstruct the European project. If we were to take Zanni's position as the official M5S policy, this would entail something of a repositioning.

The M5S is undoubtedly one of the most Eurosceptic of the parties in the Italian political arena, as illustrated, for instance, by the [Chapel Hill expert survey](#).

Opposing the deal on the grounds of defending European cohesiveness is therefore notable given the previous positions articulated by M5S, but the party has also sought to portray the outcome as further confirmation of Italy's marginalisation within the EU's institutions. Given that the UK has, in this reading, obtained several meaningful concessions, the M5S will be keen to question why Italy has never been able to reach its bargaining targets at the European level.

But what about Matteo Renzi? The Italian Prime Minister has [previously stated](#) that the EU is at a critical point and risks losing the essence of the original European dream if it loses the UK. However Renzi capitalised on the

opportunity of the renegotiation to put a fundamental issue for Italian politics, the management of the ongoing migrant crisis, further up the agenda. In Renzi's view, the EU must also act with a sense of solidarity on the issue of migration, paralleling the solidarity it has shown in arriving at an agreement with the UK.

Following blame being attributed to eastern European countries that have closed their borders or limited the numbers of migrants allowed into their territory, Renzi has advocated the need for a collective EU deal to alleviate the problem. In this it is evident that he is now trying to exploit the deal between the UK and the EU to obtain more favourable conditions for Italy in its management of the migrant crisis. But he has also been more direct in [threatening to reduce](#) EU development money for eastern European states if they continue to avoid showing solidarity over the issue.

Of course, with the ink barely dry on the agreement, more time is needed to verify the strategies all actors will implement after the UK's deal, but something can nevertheless already be said about Renzi's strategy in this regard. The Italian PM, in order to avoid a dangerous cleavage developing within the EU concerning migrants and, possibly, also concerning the strategy to deal with the continuing economic problems faced by many European countries, has an obvious interest in exploiting the deal to raise issues important for Italy and his personal standing.

Chief among these will be asking for more concessions regarding the migrant crisis and the anti-cyclical policies promoted for tackling Italy's dire economic situation. As such the deal between the UK and the EU may be important in reinforcing Renzi's position and discourse, both in Europe and in Italy. The next few weeks will make clear whether he is capable of winning this battle.

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Note: This article gives the views of the authors, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.

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