

Statement On The Vicious Attacks Of Prime Minister Meloni Against The National Union Of Students In Italy:

You Cannot Silence The Student Voice!

The European Students' Union (ESU) is appalled by the irresponsible, heinous attacks of Georgia Meloni, prime minister of Italy, against the legitimate, democratic and necessary demands and endeavours of our member union, *Unione degli Universitari* (UDU), to ensure the proper management, public accountability and adequate implementation of the EU Recovery and Resilience funds by the Government of Italy and requests swift reaction from European authorities.

During the summer, UDU sent a letter to the European Commission underlying that Italy is not spending as planned and required the funding received from the European Union, based on the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of Italy. Instead of creating new student housing facilities in a country with intense social pressures and housing shortages for students, UDU reported to the Commission that the government counts already existing places as new and that instead the funding is redirected to the private sector without meaningful benefits for students.

Instead of taking note of the issues signalled by UDU and trying to fix them, Italy's prime minister embarked on a spurious campaign on national TV to rebuke students' voices and concerns and falsely downgrade the importance of the situation. Even more concerning is that the Prime minister claimed that UDU 'hates Italians' for signalling the mismanagement issues to the Commission, which could result in a potential temporary halt of funding.

We stand in solidarity with UDU and support their future actions to protest this severe injustice. ESU strongly affirms that no student or any citizen should be afraid of raising up legitimate concerns and shed light on authorities'

wrongdoings, and we condemn this obvious attack against the fundamental values of higher education and the principle of student self-governance.

Since the inception of the Recovery and Resilience Fund, ESU emphasised and advocated for strong, compulsory and meaningful stakeholder engagement and participation in the elaboration, implementation and monitoring of National Recovery and Resilience Plans. It is obvious, from Italy's case, that the reality is far from the objectives of EU regulations.

We are calling on the European Commission to ensure that the reputation of supporting stakeholder engagement is maintained. Thus, we expect the Commission to announce that the issues signalled by UDU will be further analysed together with them and that the Commission will investigate the situation of stakeholder participation in the governance of the NRRP in Italy, a situation highlighted by UDU for a long time.

"The statements of prime minister Meloni have blatantly crossed yet another red line. We are demanding the prime minister and the government of Italy to urgently retract the accusations and to meaningfully engage UDU in solving the obvious issues related to the use of EU money for student housing. We are fully behind our member union and will further engage with the Commission to ensure an adequate follow-up on UDU's complaint. This clearly shows that much more needs to be done in order to make stakeholder participation in the use of NRRPs a reality, and the Commission is accountable for the trust that society puts in this process' declared Horia Onița, president of ESU.

"At the beginning we tried to speak to the Government, but our reports were ignored. We turned directly to the European Commission, reporting the inflated numbers of beds communicated by the Italian authorities" says Camilla Piredda, general secretary of UDU. "In fact, we discovered how private student residences that had existed for years were reporting themselves as new. Meloni, instead of assuming her responsibilities, preferred to attack CGIL, the main Italian trade union, and UDU on the main Italian television network. Together with ESU we strongly claim the need to involve the social partners in the implementation of the NRRP, as well as the right to contact European bodies directly to express student voice."