

# ‘Meloni media grab is threat to democracy’

## Italy

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Tourists lining up to enter Rome’s Pantheon were surprised yesterday when a stream of opposition politicians entered the piazza and decried the death of press freedom in Italy.

The event was a protest held by striking journalists from AGI, Italy’s second-largest press agency, following news that it may be bought by a wealthy senator from Giorgia Meloni’s ruling coalition. Antonio Angelucci is said to be aiming to add AGI to his collection of three right-wing newspapers, *Il Tempo*, *Il Giornale* and *Libero*, which pump out pro-Meloni news.

“Is this a G7 country? Are we a democracy? In a democracy things like this don’t happen,” said Giuseppe Conte, leader of the opposition Five Star party.

The purchase would make another piece of Italy’s media Meloni-friendly, joining the state television and radio network RAI, where key posts have been taken by her supporters, and the private network Mediaset, run by the family of the late prime minister Silvio Berlusconi, whose Forza Italia party is part of Meloni’s ruling coalition.

“We risk Italy reaching Hungarian levels of press control,” said Alessandra Costante, general secretary of Italy’s FNSI journalists’ union, a reference to the media takeover by Viktor Orban, Hungary’s prime minister.

AGI is owned by ENI, an Italian energy firm controlled by the finance ministry. This, in turn, is run by Giancarlo Giorgetti, a member of Matteo Salvini’s League party, which is also part of Meloni’s coalition.

“Angelucci is a senator with the League, so we would have a finance

minister involved in the sale of AGI to a member of his own political party, meaning a large conflict of interest,” said an AGI journalist. Costante said Angelucci owned health clinics around Rome and was “building a press empire to help him” expand into Lombardy.

Apart from Angelucci’s right-wing newspapers, Italy’s main titles include the pro-government *Il Messaggero*; *Corriere della Sera*, which stays neutral; and the left-wing *La Repubblica*.

Since 2020 *La Repubblica* has been controlled by the Agnelli family, who merged their car firm Fiat with PSA, the French maker of Peugeot, to create Stellantis in 2021, sparking claims from Meloni that it was safeguarding jobs in France while downsizing in Italy. When the newspaper accused Meloni in January of selling off Italy via privatisations, she said: “This accusation comes from a newspaper owned by those who have sold off Fiat to the French.” Maurizio Molinari, its editor, told *The Times*: “She criticised *La Repubblica* for decisions made by Stellantis, which is like criticising Bloomberg News over real estate investments made by its owner Michael Bloomberg.”

Discussions about freedom of the press in Italy must take into account the blurred lines between the state and the media that covers it. Italy’s press agencies receive about €46 million (£39 million) in state subsidies a year, with AGI receiving €5 million last year.

Giorgetti has asked why ENI, the state-controlled energy firm, should be running a press agency in the first place.

At the Pantheon yesterday, Carlo Calenda, an opposition politician, said he disapproved of the Agnellis owning *La Repubblica* just as he opposed the purchase of AGI by Angelucci.