



POLITICAL STUDIES SEMINARS

Seminar

Italy's return to Africa: between domestic and external drivers

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A steadily increasing number of European countries recently adopted their own 'Africa policies'. The temporal and geographical clustering of such plans suggests that a policy diffusion process might have been at play, with the introduction and the shape of a policy in a given country being influenced by those of other countries. This paper tests the policy diffusion hypothesis through an in-depth analysis of the case of Italy, a country that in recent times stepped up substantially its engagement with sub-Saharan Africa. Tracing the origins and features of Rome's policy towards the region, however, shows that external influences were much more limited than expected. It was primarily two country-specific drivers - namely, the enduring effects of the European debt crisis on the Italian economy and a sudden and massive, if temporary, increase in irregular migration - which pushed Italy towards Africa and shaped its approach. The paper thus sheds light on how the marked resemblance of policies almost contemporaneously adopted by distinct EU member states - i.e. a tight succession and a highly interconnected environment strongly pointing at cross-country influences - can hide motives and processes that are actually highly specific to each of them and essentially by-pass policy diffusion dynamics.

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