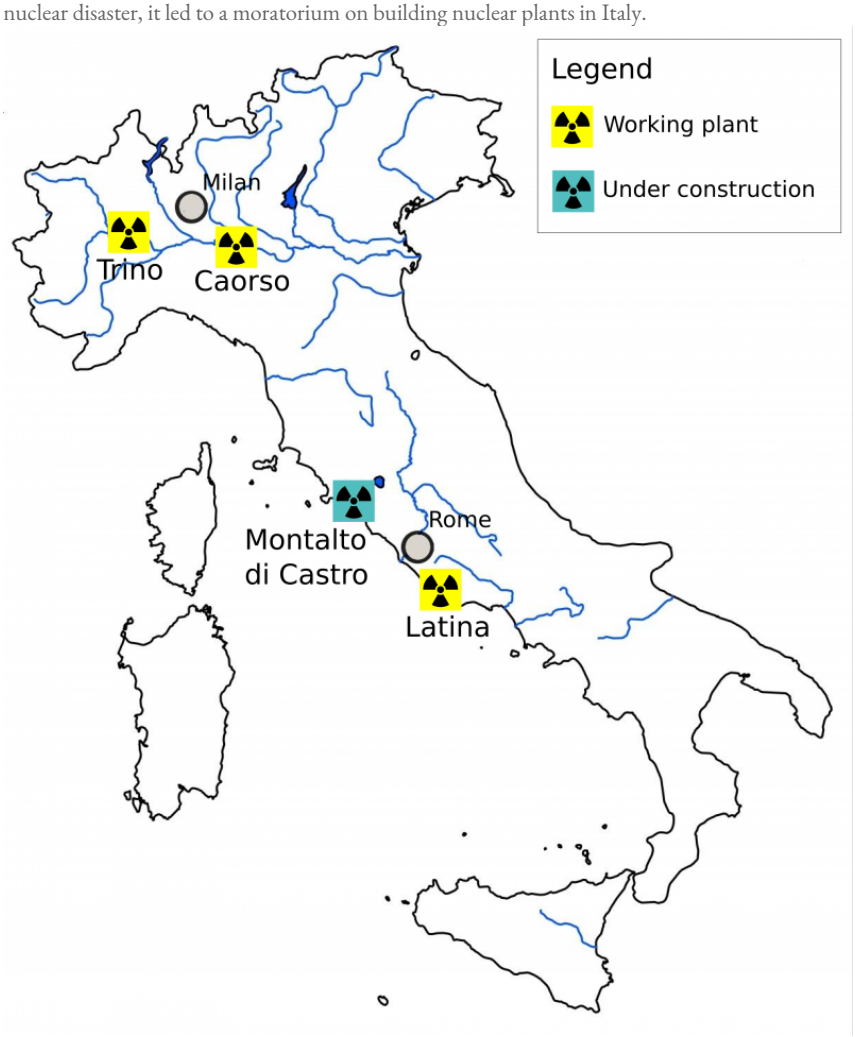
# Nuclear Power, No Thanks! The Aftermath of Chernobyl in Italy and the Nuclear Power Referendum of 1987

Wilko Graf von Hardenberg

**Summary**

The 1987 nuclear power referendum was a major political victory for the Italian environmental movement. In the wake of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, it led to a moratorium on building nuclear plants in Italy.




Map of nuclear plants in Italy in 1987

2011 Map creator: Wilko Graf von Hardenberg

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The nuclear power referendum held on 8–9 November 1987 represents one of the rare political victories of the Italian environmental movement. Organised immediately after the Chernobyl disaster of 26 April 1986 by a wide spectrum of players, including various environmentalist associations, the green party, the Communist youth organisation, and other leftist parties, it led to a moratorium on the building of nuclear plants in Italy.

About 65% of those eligible to vote did so. A majority of 80% voted in favour of the abolition of statutes and a rewards system that enabled and supported the construction of new nuclear plants. In the face of such massive opposition to nuclear power, the government even blocked the construction of nuclear plants that had already been approved and wound down plants then in use. Calls for a referendum on nuclear power had already been made at the end of the 1970s by, among others, the small but militant Radical Party.

However, only the widespread popular fear of the radioactive cloud produced by the explosion of one of Chernobyl's reactors triggered the requisite political momentum. In the accident's aftermath two major parties, the Socialist Party (part of the ruling coalition) and the Communist Party (opposition), both traditionally in favour of nuclear power, backed the anti-nuclear referendum campaign. Even the Christian Democrats, the leading party in power, feared losing votes over the issue and turned the referendum over to its supporters as a question of individual conscience.




Manifesto of the opening event of the referendum campaign

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Italian anti-nuclear logo "Nucleare No Grazie!"

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It could be said that post-Chernobyl popular sentiment induced most Italian political parties to abandon attempts made over the years to rationalise the risks and benefits of nuclear power production in favour of immediate political returns.

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**Further readings:**


- Hardenberg, Wilko Graf von, and Paolo Pelizzari. "The Environmental Question, Employment, and Development in Italy's Left, 1945–1990." *Left History* 13, no. 1 (2008): 77–105.
- Neri Serneri, Simone. *Incorporare la natura.* Roma: Carocci, 2006.
- Pelizzari, Paolo. "Socialisti e comunisti italiani di fronte alla questione energetico-nucleare 1973–1987." [Italian socialists and communists face the nuclear energy issue 1973–1987.] *Italia Contemporanea*, no. 259 (2010).


**Related links:**

- Country information by the World Nuclear Association
  http://world-nuclear.org/info/inf101.html
- The effects of the second Italian anti-nuclear referendum of 2011
  http://news.sciencemag.org/scienceinsider/2011/06/italy-says-no-to-reintroduction.html

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**Websites linked in this text:**

- https://www.environmentandsociety.org/tools/map#/id/2424/

**Websites linked in image captions:**

- http://www.radicali.it/manifesti/b36.htm
- https://rightsstatements.org/page/InC/1.0/?language=en
- http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:Nucleares_no_gracias3.png?uselang=it.

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Wilko Graf von Hardenberg is a modern historian focusing on socio-political aspects of nature perception and management in Europe and the history of the environmental sciences. He holds a degree in history from the University of Torino, Italy, and a Ph.D. in geography from the University of Cambridge. He was a postdoc, funded by the Autonomous Province of Trento, at the University of Trento, Italy, a Carson Fellow at the Rachel Carson Center in Munich, Germany, and a Scholar-in-Residence at the Deutsches Museum in Munich, Germany. His most recent research projects focus on the history of nature conservation, management, and rhetoric in the Alps and on the development of the idea of mean sea-level.
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