

POLITICAL HYPOCRISY

## Can trans athletes compete in women's sport? As long as it's for Italy

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POLITICS

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**Riccardo  
Cascioli**



'I think that athletes who have male genetic characteristics should not be allowed to compete in women's competitions. And not because you want to discriminate against anyone, but to protect the right of female athletes to be able to compete on equal

terms'. Not even a month ago Prime Minister **Giorgia Meloni pronounced these sacrosanct words.**

**It was the first of August** and the controversy was in full swing over **the case of Imane Khelif**, the Algerian boxer, who had beaten (by withdrawal in the first round), the Italian boxer Angela Carini. Khelif would go on to win the gold medal at the Olympics for her own category amid protests from other female athletes and national federations who denounced her as a man with an unacceptable competitive advantage (also very dangerous, given the sport).

**Meloni was not the only Italian politician to protest:** Matteo Salvini, leader of the League, spoke of 'shame' on the part of 'those bureaucrats who allowed a match that was clearly not on equal terms'. And many other ministers and politicians from the centre-right took up the cause, from Senate President Ignazio La Russa to Minister Eugenia Roccella; and even the minister responsible, the Minister of Sport, Andrea Abodi, attacked the International Olympic Committee (IOC) at the time, as 'incomprehensible that there is no alignment in the parameters of the minimum hormonal values at international level, thus including Europeans, World Cups and the Olympics'. Incidentally, the only dissonant voice that stood out from the mass was that of the usual **Antonio Tajani, Forza Italia, who called for the tone to be softened**, concerned about the political implications of a clash with Algeria, one of Italy's economic partners.

**Lo and behold, not even a month has passed.** And yesterday, back in Paris, the Paralympics opened and clamorously it is Italy to make history with the first transgender athlete, a certain Valentina Petrillo, born Fabrizio. So in this case there is not even a doubt about the gender of the athlete, as there is in the case of Imane Khelif: 'Valentina' really is a man who at some point in his life decided he wanted to be a woman, something that has been recognised by the Italian state even without requiring surgery.

**Petrillo who is visually impaired and will compete in the 200 and 400 metre running races**, the same distances he previously competed in - apparently with some success - when he ran in the men's category. In 2018, however, at the age of 45, after getting married and fathering two children, he decided to begin gender transition following a desire he says he has always had to be a she. And at the end of an understandably complicated bureaucratic process, the now she was able to compete in the women's category, thanks also to the 'political' pressure exerted by the transgender movement, which made her a symbol of its battles.

**The athlete Valentina Petrillo is in fact also a campaign project** of the activists of *Group Trans APS*, who have made an educational film out of her story: '*5 nanomolars - The Olympic dream of a trans woman*'. What are 5 nanomolars? It is the maximum concentration of testosterone (per litre of blood) allowed to compete in the female category: 'A symbolic boundary between male and female' as the film's authors define it. A limit to fall within for which Valentina Petrillo underwent heavy hormone treatment. To this must be added that the federation called upon to decide on such eventualities, the World Para Athletics, stipulates in its regulations that athletes legally recognised as women may participate in women's competitions.

**So does that mean everything is above board?** Not really, since Valentina Petrillo's admission to the Paralympics meant the exclusion of a Spanish athlete, Melani Berges, who arrived at the finish line behind Petrillo in the qualifying races. And Melani, as well as the Spanish federation, did not take it very well: 'Our Spanish athlete Melani Berges,' international sports law lawyer Irene Aguiar told the *Bild*, 'has lost her chance to qualify for the Paralympics. The reason is the participation of the man Fabrizio 'Valentina' Petrillo, who made it to the final instead of her. This is unfair'. And there was also *the letter from more than 40 feminist associations* around the world asking the Spanish Paralympic Federation to appeal against the elimination of their athlete. But the rules, as previously stated, are on Valentina Petrillo's side, as International Paralympic Committee president Andrew Parsons later reiterated: 'For the time being, the rules of World Para Athletics,' *he told the BBC*, 'allow Petrillo to compete, so she will be as welcome as any other athlete. I think it is right that we treat transgender athletes with respect. But I think science should provide us with the answer because we also want to be fair to other athletes. It is a very difficult issue'.

**The identical argument was used in the controversy** over the Khelif case and is now being used again for this one: to understand who is male and who is female we need science, the time of evidence and common sense has definitely passed.

**Moreover, the international controversy over the Petrillo case** erupted in mid-August. Occurring after the Khelif affair, one would have expected another immediate stance from Italy's political leaders; at the very least, an apology to the Spanish athlete who suffered the same drama as Angela Carini. And Abodi, as Minister of Sport, should at the very least have reiterated his criticism of sports federations that issue inconsistent and unfair regulations. Italy also has a Minister for Disabilities, Alessandra Locatelli, who would have had the opportunity to make herself known by standing up for disabled athletes who do not deserve to be penalised by regulations that have an

exclusively ideological basis.

**Instead, nothing. Total silence.** No one cares anymore about the issue that had so impassioned the political class just four weeks ago. And this is exactly how politicians lose all credibility, even when they fight for just battles. Because the recognition of who is a man and who is a woman cannot depend on nationality or political expediency. The denunciation of gender ideology and the injustices arising from it must apply at all times or it is just a hypocritical mask to win some consensus among certain sectors of the electorate.