

After Greece Italy now had to appoint a new President of the Republic

Corinne Deloy

Analysis

Abstract :

The President of the Italian Republic resigned on 14th January. This had been expected since Giorgio Napolitano had announced his decision to leave his position as head of State before the end of 2014 to the daily *La Repubblica* on 8th November, which he confirmed in a speech on 18th December. When he was re-elected on 23rd April 2013 Mr Napolitano warned that he would not complete his second mandate which was due to end in 2020. Finally he chose to resign on the day that Latvia took over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union from Italy.

Matteo Renzi, President of the Council asked the President of the Council to remain in office until parliament had approved the voting method that is due bring equal bicameralism to an end (the Italicum law grants a bonus to any party that wins at least 40% of the vote) and the Constitutional reform that provides for a reduction in the powers of the Senate and its transformation into a non-elected assembly. Giorgio Napolitano pointed to his age (he will be 90 on 25th June next) and his fatigue in justification of his retirement.

Indeed Matteo Renzi fears that negotiations to appoint the future President will interfere with the vote on the reform that he wants to introduce. He fears that his government allies in the New Centre Right led by Angelo Alfano, Civic Choice and the Centre Union (UdC) led by Pier Ferdinando Casini will force a candidate upon him in exchange for their support during the vote on reform.

Giorgio Napolitano, who repeats that there was no alternative to the reforms and the country's modernisation has always been an important, sound ally for Matteo Renzi, whom he appointed in February 2014. The President of the Council needs to succeed in pushing through the reform so that he enjoys a strong position in the next general elections. *"The President of the Council needs to have someone in the Presidency of the Republic who can overcome resistance within the parties and who can call early elections before his popularity declines too much,"* analyses Francesco Galietti, founder of the research centre Policy Sonar in Rome.

The government now has two weeks to organise the presidential election, the first three rounds of which are due

to take place on 29th January. In the meantime the leader of the Senate, Pietro Gasso is ensuring the interim.

THE PRESIDENTIAL FUNCTION IN ITALY: POWERS AND VOTING METHODS

In Italy the position of President of the Republic is mainly honorary. The Guarantor of the Constitution and of the country's unity, he has two main powers: he can dissolve Parliament (except in the last quarter of his term in office) and he can reject a bill put forward by the deputies or the senators for two reasons (if he deems that the text is anti-constitutional or if he believes that it is not adequately funded). Carlo Azeglio Ciampi (1999-2006) used this power against a bill on the concentration of the media in 2003 and a second time against a reform of the legal system in 2004. Giorgio Napolitano demonstrated the importance of his role in November 2011, when after Silvio Berlusconi's (1994-1995, 2001-2006 et 2008-2011), resignation he decided not to convene early parliamentary elections and chose to appoint Mario Monti (2011-2013) to the presidency of the Council. Finally he gave a great deal of support to the reforms now ongoing which have been decisive for Italy's future in the European Union.

The President of the Italian Republic is elected by secret ballot for seven years by a college of Grand Electors comprising 630 members of the Chamber of Deputies, 315 senators and 7 life senators, and 58 representatives of the country's 20 regions (3 per region, except for the Aoste Valley which only appoints one) i.e. a total of 1010.

In the first three rounds a candidate has to win at least 2/3 of the vote i.e. 674 votes. In the fourth round the simple majority (505 votes) is enough to be elected to the supreme office. Tradition has it that the President of the Republic should be a man of consensus who rallies people beyond the political parties. He usually rallies the votes of most of the Grand Electors to his name. In 2006 however the presidential election was greatly contested and Giorgio Napolitano was elected by the votes of the left-wing Grand Electors only.

The head of State was finally re-elected – a first in the country's history – on 23rd April 2013 – after six rounds of voting and many dramatic turns – after a further crisis in the wake of the parliamentary elections on 24th and 25th February.

WHO ARE THE CANDIDATES?

Just a few days from the Presidential election a few names mentioned have been:

- former President of the European Commission (1999-2004) and former President of the Council (2006-2008) Romano Prodi;
- former President of the Council (1992-1993 and 2000-2001) Giuliano Amato;
- former Mayor of Rome (2001-2008) Walter Veltroni;
- present Finance and Economy Minister Pier Carlo Padoan;
- the governor of the Bank of Italy Ignazio Visco;
- the Minister for Cultural Goods and Activities and Tourism Dario Franceschini;
- Defence Minister Roberta Pinotti;
- the spokesperson of the Democratic Party Anna Finocchiaro;
- Former European Commissioner (1995-1999) and former Foreign Affairs minister (2013-2014) Emma Bonino who has

just revealed that she has lung cancer.

According to the poll by Ixé, Emma Bonino and Romano Prodi are the two personalities who have the most support from the Italian population.

The President of the Council Matteo Renzi would like there to be only one candidate running for the suffrage of the Grand Electors. He admitted that finding a successor Giorgio Napolitano will be difficult but said that a candidate would be elected within the four rounds of voting. *"We should reasonably have the name of the President of the Republic by the end of the month,"* he declared.

The Democratic Party has 415 MPs but hopes to be able to count on dozens of allies in Parliament. We should remember in 2013, in spite of the agreement with the left Romano Prodi only won 395 votes in the fourth round of voting i.e. 100 less than the number of Grand Electors on the left.

Both the left and the right are very much divided in Italy at present, just as the Five Stars Movement (M5s) led by Beppe Grill which makes any forecast extremely difficult. Find a personality who will rally the supporters of Matteo Renzi, Silvio Berlusconi and Beppe Grillo seems to be impossible.

Unlike in Greece if no candidate is elected President of the Republic after three rounds of voting Italy will not be forced to organise a snap election. The election will go on until a Head of State is finally appointed. In 1971 Giovanni Leone was appointed after 23 rounds of voting. In 1985 one day was enough for Francesco Cossiga to be elected.

After his resignation from the President of the Republic Giorgio Napolitano returned to being a life senator (which he was from 2005 and 2006). In this capacity he will be taking part in the appointment of his successor. The outgoing head of State who will also now become President of Honour, wants Italy to remain "united and serene in a difficult world."

Sergio Mattarella is the new President of the Italian Republic

Abstract :

Corinne Deloy

Sergio Mattarella was elected President of the Italian Republic on 31st January 655 votes in support (out of 995 voters) during the fourth round of voting i.e. 150 votes more than the 505 necessary to succeed outgoing head of State a Giorgio Napolitano, who resigned from office on 14th January.

Results

During the Italian presidential election a 2/3 majority of the 1010 grand electors (672 votes) is needed to be appointed as head of State during the first three

rounds of voting, but the simple majority is required (505 votes) is enough as of the 4th round.

The President of the Council Matteo Renzi (Democratic

Party, PD) called on the members of his party to put in a blank slip in the first three rounds of voting that took place on 29th [1] and 30th January then to rally to the name of Sergio Mattarella on 31st January. *"He is the candidate in whom we are placing our credibility. There will not be any other Democratic Party candidate,"* he said.

This presidential election is – in the wake of the European elections on 24th and 25th May 2014 another success for Matteo Renzi who succeeded in circumventing the opposition of former head of government (1994-1995, 2001-2006 et 2008-2011) Silvio Berlusconi (Forza Italia, FI) to his candidate by rallying the vote of the New Centre-Right (NCD) of Home Affairs Minister Angelino Alfano.

The head of government proved to all of those who had criticised him for being "close" to the *Cavaliere*, notably the members of the Democratic Party's left-wing, that he was the one who was in control. He can also be happy to have succeeded in having brought about the election of a president of the Republic who will help him in the reforms that he would like to introduce. *"Matteo Renzi can celebrate this victory. He rallied his party, strengthened his coalition and he asserted himself over Silvio Berlusconi,"* analyses Vincenzo Scarpetta, analyst for Open Europe (London).

WHO IS THE NEW PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC?

"Sergio Mattarella is a man who represents 'legality', someone who has fought against the Mafia (his brother Piersanti, elected President of the region of Sicily in 1978 was assassinated by the Mafia on 6th January 1980). *He is one of the rare Christian Democrats who have had the courage to resign,"* declared Matteo Renzi just before the fourth round.

The new President of the Republic quit his post as Public Instruction Minister in 1990 in protest against the approval of a bill on the audio-visual industry which he deemed to be a gift made to Silvio Berlusconi. In 1999, he qualified the entry of Forza Italia (FI) within the European People's Party (EPP) as an 'irrational nightmare'.

Aged 73 and from Palermo (Sicily) Sergio Mattarella was firstly a teacher of parliamentary law at the

University of Palermo. A former member of the Christian Democratic Party he was elected MP in 1983 and was regularly re-elected after that. He was also a minister four times: Minister for Relations with the Parliament (1987-1989), then Public Instruction Minister (1989-1990), Defence (1998-1999) and Vice-President of the Council (1998-1999) in Massimo Alema's government (1998-2000).

In 1993, Sergio Mattarella was the rapporteur for the bill (called *Mattarellum*) which changed the Italian electoral system (introduction of the majority vote to bring the country stability This bill was in force until the elections of 31st May 2001.

Sergio Mattarella is close to the Democratic Party but he never joined it however. He has not had a high profile in the political arena over the last few years and since 11st October 2011 he has sat as a judge at the Constitutional Court.

SILVIO BERLUSCONI'S FAILURE

The election of Sergio Mattarella as President of the Republic is undeniably a defeat for Silvio Berlusconi, who was obliged to follow the election from his villa in Lombardy, since he has been confined to house arrest every weekend since he was convicted in the Mediaset affair on August 1st 2013.

The former President of the Council who, with his vote, enabled the adoption of the reform of the voting method (*Italicum*) and also that of the Labour Market targeted by Matteo Renzi, but countered by the left wing of the Democratic Party (24 Democrat senators voted against the *Italicum* bill on 24th January) believed he was the kingmaker in this presidential election. He said he would refuse to vote for someone from the left and because Mr Renzi had chosen Mr Mattarella, he accused the head of government of having broken the agreement which had bound them together - which in his opinion included an agreement between the two men on a joint candidate. On 18th January 2014 Matteo Renzi and Silvio Berlusconi signed the Nazareno Pact (the name of the street in Rome where the HQ of the Democratic Party lies), which stipulates that Forza Italia will support the reforms put forward by the government on the Senate and on a change to the electoral law. In exchange for this guarantee of support, the *Cavaliere*

1. Ferdinando Imposimato, the candidate put forward by the Five Stars Movement (M5s) led by Beppe Grillo came out ahead in the first round of voting on 29th January with 120 votes. Then half of the Grand Electors voted blank.

wanted to be able to recover his seat in the Senate which he lost on 27th November 2013 after a solemn, public vote. He was counting on the flexibility, the generosity and especially the pardon of the future head of State. His hopes are not to become a reality because Sergio Mattarella is a strict man of conviction, and extremely respectful of the law.

Silvio Berlusconi therefore lost his wager and will now have to face opposition from within his own party. Led by Raffaele Fitto, some members accuse the former President of the Council of having accepted Matteo Renzi's conditions without making sure that his own interests were protected, in brief, to have been tricked. Only 105 of the 143 Forza Italia MPs obeyed the voting instructions given by the *Cavaliere* on 28th and 29th January last to vote blank in the first three rounds of the election.

Beppe Grillo is the other loser in this presidential election. The leader of the Five Stars Movement (M5s) asked MPs to vote for the former magistrate Ferdinando Imposimato in each round of voting, which was not followed either.

The presidential election is surely a success for Matteo Renzi. He might experience some difficulties in the months to come however in terms of introducing the reforms he has been drafting if Silvio Berlusconi withdraws his support or if the *Cavaliere* finds himself in a minority within Forza Italia.

To exercise his new office Sergio Mattarella just has to cross the road – indeed the Constitutional Court is opposite the Quirinal Palace, the residence of the Italian heads of State.

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