

European
Elections monitor

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ANALYSIS

The right running favourite in the Italian parliamentary election on 4th March next.

On 28th December last the President of the Italian Republic, Sergio Mattarella dissolved the parliament (Assembly and Senate) and convened parliamentary elections on 4th March next. According to the Constitution these must be organised within 40 to 70 days after the dissolution. Three camps face each other in these parliamentary elections. On the one side there is the right-wing, represented by Forza Italia (FI), the party of former President of the Council (1994-1995, 2001-2006 and 2008-2011) Silvio Berlusconi, the Northern League (LN) led by Matteo Salvini, and the Brothers of Italy (FdI) led by Giorgia Meloni; on the other there is the left-wing, whose main movement, the Democratic Party (PD) led by Matteo Renzi, to which the present head of government Paolo Gentiloni belongs. The third camp is the 5 Stars Movement (M5S) founded by Beppe Grillo, an undefinable populist party which is rejecting any coalition with the other parties and led at present by Luigi di Maio.

According to the most recent poll by Tecne, published at the end of January, the M5S is due to come out ahead with 27.8% of the vote. It is forecast to beat the Democratic Party, which is due to win 22.2% of the vote, Forza Italia, 18.3%, the (Northern) League, 12.8% and the Brothers of Italy, 5.1%. Together the three latter parties that lie on the right of the political scale, are due to win 36.2% of the vote and would not therefore hold the absolute majority (with the new voting method, this is achieved with 40% of the vote). Some observers are promoting the fact that Forza Italia might join forces with the Democratic Party after the election, a possibility that both Silvio Berlusconi and Matteo Renzi are ruling out for the time being...

A DIFFICULT END TO THE CRISIS

After the previous parliamentary elections on 24th and 25th February 2013, neither of the two main coalitions - on the left led by Pier Luigi Bersani or on the right led by Silvio Berlusconi, won the absolute majority of seats in the Chamber of Deputies and in the Senate, which was a real problem because of the perfect bicameralism in force at the time, which granted similar powers to both houses of parliament and forces the executive to have the majority in each of the assemblies to be able to govern. The electoral breakthrough by the populist M5S also caused turmoil in the

Italian political universe, which until then, had largely been dominated by a two-party system.

Some days after the election on 20th April the outgoing President of the Republic Giorgio Napolitano was re-elected as head of the country by the "grand electors", who were unable to find a successor to Napolitano. Some days after that on 28th April the President of the Republic appointed Enrico Letta (PD) as President of the Council of a government of national unity. Letta was overthrown by a vote of no confidence within the Democratic Party and replaced by Matteo Renzi on 22nd February 2014.

The new President of the Council introduced several major reforms, including that of the labour market, the Jobs Act, which was challenged by some on the left – another reform enabled same sex marriage, challenged by some on the right. Likewise, he worked towards the approval of a new electoral law that would bring perfect bicameralism to an end. On 4th December 2016 a large majority (59.11%) of the Italians rejected the draft reform of the Constitution put forward to them by Matteo Renzi, which aimed to strengthen the stability of the Italian political system and to facilitate the decision-making process. The M5S, LN, Forza Italia and the parties on the far left and a share of the Democratic Party, led by former President of the Council (1998-2000) Massimo d'Alema and former Prime Minister Pier Luigi Bersani, called to vote "no". Both men left the Democratic Party and founded "Article 1-Democratic and Progressive Movement" (MDP) on 25th February 2017.

After the referendum the President of the Council, who wagered his fate on the result of the popular consultation, resigned from office. On 12th December Matteo Renzi was replaced by his Foreign Affairs Minister Paolo Gentiloni (PD). There are seven parties in the outgoing coalition: the Democratic Party, the Centrists for Europe (CpE) led by Pier Ferdinando Cassini, Mutual Democracy (DemoS) led by Lorenzo Dellai, Democratic Centre (CD) led by Bruno Tabacchi and the New Centre-Right (NCD) led by Angelino Alfano. The latter was created on 15th November 2013 by a group of dissidents from the People's Party for Freedom (PdL) who were against the transformation of their party, which had become Forza Italia.

On 3rd November 2017 a new electoral law was passed, called Rosatellum bis, after the man who drafted this reform, Ettore Rosato, leader of the Democratic Party group in the Chamber of Deputies.

The Camera dei Deputati comprises 630 members elected for 5 years: 232 MPs (i.e. 37% of the total) are appointed according to a single-member constituency vote, 386 (61%) are chosen according

to a proportional vote and 12 (2%) are elected by the Italians living abroad.

The Senate (Senato della Repubblica) comprises 315 members elected for 5 years in the same manner as the MPs: 116 are chosen according to a single-member constituency vote, 193 are appointed at regional level according to a proportional system and 6 are elected by the Italians living abroad. There are also some life Senators, former Presidents of the Republic and other people appointed by the Head of State in office.

The attribution of seats is undertaken according to the d'Hondt method. A political party must obligatorily win at least 3% of the vote to have some seats attributed according to the proportional system (10% of the vote for a coalition).

The President of the Council, Paolo Gentiloni, chose to put his government on the line and asked for a vote of confidence for the adoption of the new electoral law that was approved on 12th October by the Chamber of Deputies by 375 votes and 215 and on 26th October by the Senate 214 in support, 61 against.

The new law which is more proportional than majority in nature, does not guarantee a stable post-electoral majority. "By mixing the majority and the proportional systems, the law favours parties that can form coalitions which is the case with the Democratic Party and the two main opposition parties on the right, the Northern League and Forza Italian. The M5S, which has always rejected any alliance, is undoubtedly the party that is most penalised by this text," analyses Franco Pavoncello, Professor of Political Science at the American University of Rome. Beppe Grillo criticised this new electoral law (that he called Fascistellum), in the most virulent manner, qualifying the text as "anti-democratic" and "anti-constitutional" saying that it had "one goal and that was to oust from power Italy's leading party". "The aim is to destroy us. It is an infringement of democratic law, a death knell to democracy," stressed Luigi Di Maio, the M5S candidate for the post of President of the Council.

"Italy remains divided into two blocks, one on the right and other on the left, which fail to hold a clear, strong, stable majority. On 4th March we might see

a repetition of the scenario that we have witnessed over the last 25 years, which have been marked by alternation between populist and technical governments," declared Raffaele Landani, professor of Political Science at the University of Bologna.

A COMEBACK FOR SILVIO BERLUSCONI?

When he entered office Matteo Renzi promised a "rottomazione" (a complete clear out/scraping, which should have "dispatched the old political leaders to the scrap heap"), but the rising figure of the Italian political landscape on the eve of the election is indeed 81-year-old Silvio Berlusconi, who is in quest of winning back office.

The Cavaliere is not allowed to run for any mandate on the grounds of his conviction in 2013 to a term of ineligibility for tax fraud in favour of his group Mediaset, a conviction which he declares is unconstitutional. The law of 6th November 2012, the so-called Severino Bill, makes any person having a prison sentence of over 2 years for fraud or corruption ineligible for office. Silvio Berlusconi has appealed against this sentence at the European Court of Human Rights. The former head of the Italian government is also banned from exercising any public office until 2019.

However, his ineligibility is not preventing the Cavaliere from featuring alongside the Forza Italia logo on the voting slips, which in his opinion, should attract 2 million additional votes in support of his party. "This time he can play the kingmaker or be one of the kingmakers but he cannot be king," indicated Pierangelo Isernia, a professor of political science at the University of Sienna. "It is highly unlikely that at 81 Silvio Berlusconi will become head of government for the fourth time, but I cannot say that it is impossible because with Silvio Berlusconi nothing is impossible," stressed Giovanni Orsina, a political expert and professor of history at the University Luiss in Rome.

Allied to the Brothers of Italy, Forza Italia came out ahead in the regional elections that took place on 5th November in Sicily. "With this coalition we can win anywhere. We have shown that together we are

the only ones who can beat M5S, which really is a danger," said Berlusconi after the election, which was a kind of test prior to the parliamentary elections on 4th March. Nello Musumeci was elected president of Sicily. The candidate of the united right won with 39.85% of the vote ahead of Giancarlo Cancelleri (M5S) who won 34.65%. "I am very satisfied with the Sicilian election results (...), it is a major success for the moderates: we are the only alternative solution to Beppe Grillo's M5S," declared Silvio Berlusconi on 7th November in the daily *Le Corriere della Sera*.

The right-wing alliance also won in the last local by-elections (1004 communities out of a total of 8000 across Italy), which took place on 11th and 25th June last. The left-wing lost the cities of Genoa, Palermo, L'Aquila and Catanzaro.

In the 1990's the Cavaliere stood as the only rampart to counter communism and the "red judges" in an Italian judiciary, which in his opinion, was under the influence of the far left. 20 years later he is standing again as the rampart against the populism of M5S and against the chaos that would ensue if this party came to office, but also as the only one to be able to rally the Italian right around Forza Italia and if necessary to unite the right and the left within government.

"Once more Silvio Berlusconi rises and is the only one to be able to unify the right. He has re-created the coalition with the post-fascists and the separatists in the North, which are now defending national identity against the immigrants rather than the autonomy of the wealthy regions. Without Forza Italia these two movements are dominated by extremists. Since the Second World War Italy has always been governed by a centre-right hinge-party, firstly by Christian Democracy, then Berlusconi's parties," analyses Franco-Pavoncello, a political expert of the university John Cabot Rome.

Silvio Berlusconi has hardly changed a line in the programme which has always been his own - he always promises greater economic liberalisation, massive tax cuts and a reform of the legal system. "Of course, we shall have a grand political programme to change Italy that will comprise three main points: a deep fiscal reform for the reduction of taxes, a real

halt to illegal immigration and a different relationship with Europe,” declared the Cavaliere.

The parties on the right agreed on 18th January last on a platform that provides for tax cuts (abolition of the property tax on the main domicile, as well as car tax on the first vehicle, a decrease in inheritance tax), tighter control on immigration, cancellation of any increases in retirement ages and the establishment of a flat VAT, income and corporate tax rate (which is due to decrease) that Silvio Berlusconi would like to set at between 20% to 25% (after the exemption of the first 12,000€ in respect of the progressivity principle included in the Constitution) which the Northern League would like to set at 15%. The parties on the right believe that the reduction in tax revenues will be compensated by an increase in household consumption, which will have more cash, and also via the fight to counter tax fraud. The Northern League maintains that it will recover 40 billion € like this. The former President of the Council is also promising to offer a monthly revenue of 1000€ to 5 million of the poorest households and to double the minimum retirement pension, which would rise to 1000€ per month (over 13 months) The Fornero Bill (after the then Labour and Social Policy Minister, Elsa Fornero) of 2011, which provides for a staggered increase in the retirement age, would be abandoned. Finally, the Cavaliere wants to launch a Marshall Plan for Africa to reduce illegal immigration in Italy.

Although he qualifies the euro as a “failed experiment” and wants Italy to recover its monetary sovereignty, Silvio Berlusconi has promised that Italy would respect the EU’s budgetary criteria if his party wins.

At the end of November last Silvio Berlusconi suggested that the Carabinieri General Leonardo Gallitelli be the future head of the right-wing government if Forza Italia wins on 4th March next. Aged 69 Gallitelli led the Carabinieri from 2009 to 2015, a police force that depends both on the Defence and Internal Affairs Ministry. Gallitelli now directs the Italian Anti-Doping Office. But on 25th January, the Cavaliere praised Antonio Tajani, the President of the European Parliament, who in his opinion, would be a

“marvellous choice” for the post of President of the Italian Council.

If he does not win the elections, Silvio Berlusconi has promised to withdraw from political life “It will mean that the Italians are unable to judge between people who have done things in their life and those who haven’t,” he indicated

The Northern League, which modified its name to “League” (Lega) is now established across the entire Italian territory. Its leader Matteo Salvini has even created an association Noi con Salvini (NcS – With Salvini) to assert his party’s presence in the central and southern regions of the country. The populist party has made issues of security its leading issue in these elections. “We want to chase out illegal immigrants of whom there are too many, close the Roma camps and defend the borders,” declared Matteo Salvini. 119,368 people landed on the Italian coast in 2017.

THE LEFT STRUGGLING

Former President of the Council Matteo Renzi was re-elected with over 69% of the vote as head of the Democratic Party on 30th April 2017; around 2 million people took part in this primary election. Although this victory offers him undeniable legitimacy, it is not preventing the increasing number of defections in the party. Hence, former Mayor of Milan, Giuliano Pisapia has just left the ranks of the Democrats after the failure of the jus soli bill (that would have granted automatic nationality to the children of immigrants living in Italy for more than five years). At the end of October last, after the adoption of the new electoral bill, the President of the Senate Pietro Grasso, chose to leave the Democratic Party to found Free and Equal (Liberi e Uguali, LeU), a left-wing party against Matteo Renzi. LeU is promising an increase in education spending, faster energy transition and the cancellation of the reform of the labour bill adopted between 2014 and 2015 by Matteo Renzi’s government. Although this policy worked well over the first few months, since businesses had tax incentives to take on new employees, progress is

SHOULD THE M5S BE FEARED?

now no longer being made. It did however lead to the creation of 655,000 new jobs. LeU blames the Jobs Act for creating unstable work contracts. The party also criticises the union of the Democratic Party with the forces on the right in government. Matteo Renzi is accusing his former partners of "not having any other strategy than to make him lose."

The Democratic Party leader who is running for a seat as Senator, has promised to reduce taxes and increase the budgetary deficit in the event of victory on 4th March. "We shall bring the deficit up to 2.90% of the GDP again by reducing taxes by 30 to 50 billion €," he declared. The DP's programme is promising the creation of a minimum wage of 10€ per hour (15% of workers would be concerned by this) to fight against unemployment, to invest more and better in innovative sectors and to manage the arrival of refugees and migrants more efficiently. Matteo Renzi wants to "defend Italy from the populism of M5S supporters and the extremism of Matteo Salvini and Silvio Berlusconi." "If some believe that the incompetence of M5S and the provocations on the part of the Lega are more useful to Italy, we shall respect the result, but I see another Italy, that is alive and kicking," he likes to stress.

Since 2013, Matteo Renzi has lost the image he enjoyed as a moderniser. Moreover, whilst it seemed that he accepted the verdict of the ballot box and he resigned after the referendum on 4th December 2016, he finally showed his impatience to return to the political fray. "Matteo Renzi was a newcomer and he was a good president of the Council, but he made a mistake in the referendum and he especially made a mistake afterwards, by not learning the lessons. He should have taken advantage of this by taking a break of 3 years before returning," declared the long standing CEO of L'Espresso Group, Carlo de Benedetti to the daily Le Corriere della Sera.

The Democratic Party list is led by outgoing Economy and Finance Minister Pier Carlo Padoan, himself a candidate for a MPs seat in Sienna.

The Five Stars Movement is a Eurosceptic, ecologist party that rejects the elites, hopes to close the Italian route to migrants, wants to establish a citizens' revenue of 780€, defends public services and representative democracy, as well as the monitoring of the representatives by the represented. The party refuses to position itself on the political scale. Its former leader Beppe Grillo, ineligible due to his conviction in 1985 for manslaughter after a road accident, has distanced himself from the party.

The M5S clearly has clearly toned down its anti-euro narrative but has made a referendum on the exit of the euro zone one of its battle horses, an idea that has now been almost abandoned. "I think that it is no longer the moment for Italy to quit the euro," declared Luigi di Maio at the beginning of January to reassure a share of Italian public opinion that is not necessarily in favour of this idea and more concerned about the arrival of migrants in Italian than by the European currency crisis, as well as a share of Rome's European partners. The M5S wants to be free of the rules dictated by Brussels and is advocating for example rising beyond the 3% of the public deficit to revive the economy. He maintains that he wants to reduce the State's debt to 90% of the GDP, (it stands at 133% right now) and income tax; the party wants to increase spending on families and take on thousands of people in the public sector.

Luigi di Maio, appointed as candidate for the Presidency of the Council by 31,000 votes out of 37,000 in the party's primary election has said that M5S should be asked to appoint a government if it wins the election. The populist leader maintains that his party was prepared to join forces with the parties who so wanted, but that it might also consider asking for the occasional support of majorities in parliament. "If we cannot govern alone as we wish, we shall launch a public appeal to other political forces which will be represented in Parliament. We shall put forward our team and our programme and we shall govern with all of those (except for Matteo Renzi and Silvio Berlusconi) who agree with us," he declared. It seems inconceivable however that the President of

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the Republic, Sergio Mattarella, will decide to appoint the M5S leader as President of the Council after the elections on 4th March. Any pretender to the post of head of government will have to be a unifier who can form a majority around his name.

THE GENTILONI SOLUTION

Just one month before the election, everything is possible. In the event of neither the left nor the right, or the M5S winning a majority, many political observers believe that the outgoing President of the Council, Paolo Gentiloni, might be an ideal compromise. After just over a year as head of government, Gentiloni, who is running for a seat in Rome, is the most popular political leader in the country and the most likely candidate to become prime minister; he would be the preferred choice of 45% of the Italians.

He rejoiced at his government's results. "The legislature was tumultuous but productive. Italy is up and running again after the most serious post-war crisis. I am leaving a stronger, more unified Italy," he maintained. The GDP rose over the last 13 quarters (1.8% in 2017) and economic analysts are anticipating growth of 1.5% in 2018. The deficit dropped below the 2%/GDP level and unemployment has declined to lie at 10.8%; youth unemployment has also declined but is still high (32.2%). Likewise, public debt in Italy is still one of the highest in the euro area (133% of the GDP).

THE ITALIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM

The Italian political parties which are not represented in parliament must imperatively win between 1,500 and 4000 voters' signatures living in a constituency (300 in the Aosta Valley) to be able to run in the parliamentary elections in that constituency. Candidates running for an MP's seat must be aged at least 25 and those aspiring to the Upper House must be aged at least 40. Moreover, although Italians of 18 and over can appoint their MPs, only those over 25 are allowed to elect the members of the Senate.

Italy has a great number of political parties. They are divided into 11 groups at present represented in the Camera dei Deputati:

- the Democratic Party (Partito democratico, PD) of the outgoing President of the Council, a party founded by Walter Veltroni in April 2007 based on the Left Democrats (DS) of Piero Fassino and La Margherita of Francesco Rutelli. Led by former President of the Council (2014-2016) Matteo Renzi, it has 281 seats;
- The Five Stars Movement (Movimento 5 Stelle, M5S), a populist party founded by Beppe Grillo and Gianroberto Casaleggio on 4th October 2009, led by Luigi de Maio, has 88 seats;
- the People's Party for Freedom (Il Popolo della Libertà, PdL), created on 12th December 2007 by former President of the Council (1994-1995, 2001-2006 and 2008-2011) Silvio Berlusconi. Dissolved in the summer of 2013 by its leader which established Forza Italia (FI) - it has 56 seats;
- Article 1 Democratic and Progressive Movement (Articolo 1 Movimento Democratico e Progressista, MDP), born of a scission in February 2017 led by Roberto Speranza and including Massimo D'Alema and Pier Luigi Bersani, which joined the Liberi e Uguali coalition on 3rd December for the upcoming election - has 42 seats;
- The People's Alternative (Alternativa Popolare (AP), Centrists for Europe (Centristi per l'Europa (CpE), which rallies the parties of Angelino Alfano, the outgoing Foreign Affairs Minister and Pier Ferdinando Cassini - 23 seats;
- The Northern League (Lega LN) a populist, xenophobic party created in 1989 by Umberto Bossi, led by Matteo Salvini has 22 seats;
- the Italian Left (Sinistra Italiana SI), a left-wing party created in February 2017 of the merger with Left, Ecology and Freedom (Sinistra Ecologia Libertà, SEL), has 17 seats;
- Democratic Solidarity - Democratic Centre (Democrazia Solidale - Centro Democratico (DeS-CD), 12 seats;
- Brothers of Italy (FdI), a party founded on 21st December 2012 and born of the split of the People's Party for Freedom, led by Giorgia Meloni, 12 seats;

- Civic Choice for Italy (Scelta Civica per l'Italia, SC), a centrist party created on 4th January 2013 by former President of the Council (2011-2013) Mario Monti who left. It is now led by Mariano Rabino with 16 MPs;
- There are 61 MPs who are affiliated to the mixed (Misto) group including:
 - 14 MPs Civici e Innovatori (CI) - Energie per l'Italia, born of the split between Civic Choice for Italy (SC);
 - 10 MPs of Direzione Italia (DI), conservatives and reformists;
 - 6 Centre Union MPs (UdC);
 - 6 MPs of the linguistic minorities – 5 from the South Tyrol People's Party (Partito Popolare Sudtirolese - Südtiroler Volkspartei, SVP), a Democratic-Christian party representing the German speaking Italians from the autonomous province of Bolzano led by Arno Kompatscher and one from Autonomy, Freedom, Democracy of the Aosta Valley Autonomia Libertà Partecipazione Ecologia, ALPE);
 - 5 MPs who quit M5S (Alternativa Libera et Tutti insieme per l'Italia);
 - 3 MPs of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI);
 - and 17 non-affiliated MPs.

REMINDER OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS ON 24TH AND 25TH FEBRUARY 2013 IN ITALY

Chamber of Deputies :

Turnout : 75,2%

Coalitions	Political Parties	Number of votes won	Number of seats won
Citizens' Italy	Democratic Party (PD)	8 934 009	297
	Left, Ecology and Freedom (SEL)	1 106 665	37
	Democratic Centre (CD)	167 328	6
	People's Party of South Tyrol (SVP)	146 800	5
			345
Centre Right Coalition	People for Freedom Party (PdL)	7 477 885	98
	Northern League (LN)	1 392 918	18
	Brothers of Italy (FdI)	669 816	9
			125
With Mario Monti for Italy	5 Stars Movement (M5S)	8 799 982	109
	Civic Choice for Italy (SC)	3 004 883	39
	Centre Union (UdC)	609 676	8
			47
	Movement of Italians abroad (MAIE)	140 868	2
	Italian emigrés of South America (USEI)	43 918	1
	Autonomy, Freedom, Democracy, (UV-SA-FA)	18 376	1

Source : <http://elezionistorico.interno.gov.it/index.php?tpel=C&dtel=24/02/2013&tpa=I&tpe=A&lev0=0&levsut0=0&es0=S&ms=S>

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Sénat Participation :**Turnout : 75,11%**

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Political Parties	Number of votes won	Number of seats won
Citizens' Italy	10 007 429	123
Centre Right Coalition	8 418 688	117
5 Stars Movement (M5S)	7 471 671	54
With Mario Monti for Italy	2 983 128	19
Others	144 899	2

Source : <http://elezionistorico.interno.gov.it/index.php?tpel=S&dtel=24/02/2013&tpa=I&tpe=A&lev0=0&levsut0=0&es0=S&ms=S>

Populist parties ahead in the Italian parliamentary elections

RESULTS

Two parties won the parliamentary elections on 4th March in Italy: the 5 Stars Movement (M5S) and the Northern League (Lega). The M5S, a populist party led by Luigi di Maio confirmed its place as the peninsula's leading party. It won 32.68% of the vote, a score higher than in the previous parliamentary elections on 24th and 25th February 2013.

The right coalition formed by Forza Italia (FI), the party of former President of the Council (1994-1995, 2001-2011), Silvio Berlusconi, the League (Lega), a populist, anti-European, xenophobic party led by Matteo Salvini and the Brothers of Italy (FdI), led by Giorgia Meloni – came out ahead in the parliamentary elections. Together these parties won 37% of the vote but they failed to win the absolute majority.

Within this coalition the League easily drew ahead of Forza Italia winning 17.37% of the vote. Relinquishing his regionalist demands Matteo Salvini undeniably won his wager of making his party a National League (Italians First). Forza Italia and the League agreed that the party which came out ahead would lead any possible government. As for Silvio Berlusconi, he did not succeed in making a comeback and failed to convince the Italians that he would be a buffer against the populists to guarantee Italy's stability. Forza Italy won 14.01% of the vote, the lowest result in its history and the Brothers of Italy, 4.35% of the vote.

Finally, as in many other European countries, the left suffered serious defeat. The Democratic Party -PD – of outgoing President of the Council Paolo Gentiloni, led by Matteo Renzi and outgoing Economy and Finance Minister Pier Carlo Padoan in this election, won 18.72% of the vote, i.e. the lowest result since the foundation of the party in 2007. In all the left coalition won 22.85% of the vote.

Free and Equal (LeU), the left party against Matteo Renzi founded by the outgoing leader of the Senate Pietro Grasso, won 3.39% of the vote.

"For the first time in Europe the anti-system forces have won," it said in the editorial of the daily La Stampa on 5th March. Indeed, the M5S, the League, and the Brothers of Italy won 54.4% of the vote.

The new electoral law, Rosatellum bis, adopted on 3rd November last, will not have enabled Italy discern a majority. "The verdict is still the same: the country suffers permanent instability. Being ungovernable is now an endemic sickness," indicated Claudio Tito, an editorialist at the La Repubblica.

Turnout was below that recorded in the previous parliamentary elections on 24th and 25th February 2013 (- 2.29 points). It totalled 72.91%.

RESULTS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS OF 4TH MARCH 2018 IN ITALY

Chamber of Deputies

Turnout: 72.91%

Political Parties	% of the vote won	Seats (proportional)	Total seats
5 Stars Movement (M5s)	32.68	133	221
Democratic Party (PD)	18.72	86	112
League (Lega)	17.37	73	260
Forza Italia (FI)	14.01	59	
Brothers of Italy (FdI)	4.35	19	
Free and Equal (LeU)	3.39	14	
SVP		2	

Source : Italian Ministry for the Interior <http://elezioni.interno.gov.it/camera/scrutini/20180304/scrutiniCI>

Senate

Turnout: 72.91%

Political Parties	% of the vote won	Seats (proportional)	Total seats
5 Stars Movement (M5s)	32.21	68	112
Democratic Party (PD)	19.12	43	57
League (Lega)	17.63	37	135
Forza Italia (FI)	14.43	33	
Brothers of Italy (FdI)	4.26	7	
Free and Equal (LeU)	3.27	4	
SVP	3,28	1	

Source : Italian Ministry for the Interior <http://elezioni.interno.gov.it/senato/scrutini/20180304/scrutiniSI>

M5S Italy's leading party cannot govern alone. In the last days of electoral campaign, it talked of possible alliances with other political parties, an option that it had ruled out until then.

"The M5S result is a triumph, a climax," declared outgoing MP Alessandro di Battista when the results were announced. "This especially shows another important thing: that all of the other political parties will have to come and speak with us. And this will be the first time that this has happened," he added. "There is a certain factor that has emerged from the first results now coming in, it is that M5S will be the pillar of

the next legislature," maintained one of the party's leaders, Alfonso Bonafede.

The populists have managed to increase their electorate, which was already stable, and therefore to continue as Italy's leading party.

Luca di Maio hopes to transform M5S into a party that can govern. The result on 4th March might offer him that possibility. "The vote for M5S is not just one of protest but it is also one of acceptance. The movement is extremely well established in public opinion because it addresses many

of the economic and social crisis, of Euroscepticism, of mistrust towards the political world," indicates Marc Lazar, a researcher at Sciences Po. "Luca di Maio is providing M5S with new impetus, he no longer wants to remain a protest party. He says that he has to take his responsibilities and assume them, he has to be competent. This means breaking with the traditional dimension of M5S, because he is not ruling out making alliances in order to govern. This is an all-time first, because in the last parliamentary elections on 24th and 25th February 2013 M5S based itself on the rejection of all compromise," he added.

"It is an immense source of satisfaction for the League and for Matteo Salvini, it is a historic result. We have won votes in the north and south and I think that Matteo Salvini's challenge has largely been won. Naturally we shall discuss matters with our allies first. We are looking to the future with great serenity and a sense of duty. We know what we have to do," declared Giancarlo Giorgetti, the League's second -in-command after the announcement of the results.

The theme of immigration was the centre of the electoral campaign, notably after one of the League's supporters, Luca Traini, opened fire on a crowd on 3rd February in Macerata, a town that lies in the Marches, shooting at a group of Africans, and injuring three of them in revenge for the murder of an 18 year-old girl – an affair in which three Nigerians are under suspicion. This attack led to violent demonstrations and confrontation between the far left and far right in several of the country's towns. Luca Traini's actions did not therefore damage the League.

The League, which now covers the entire peninsula, is also more critical of the European Union. "Some say that they want more Europe, I say that we must have more Italy," repeated Matteo Salvini during the campaign. Some political observers maintain that the previous attacks by the party against Italians in the south have now turned into attacks against the leaders of Europe.

On the left, the Democratic Party of Matteo Renzi seems to be the major loser in these elections. The former President of the Council (2014-2016), who in an interview with the daily *Il Mattino* on 18th February last invited the Italians to vote for his party whilst holding their nose, failed to achieve the goal that he had set of winning at least 25% of the vote. He announced that he will resign from the head of the PD. Undoubtedly the Democratic Party fell victim to the sanction sometimes inflicted on outgoing governments (since 1994 each parliamentary election has led to alternation in Italy) because even though the socio-economic situation in Italy has improved (according to the figures), the Italians do not seem to share this view. Moreover, the Democratic Party was not spared by the deep crisis that is affecting all social democratic forces in Europe.

The M5S and the League might form a majority in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. The leaders of both parties have however rejected any possibility of joining forces. In all events that was the case prior to the election ... The next stage is set for 23rd March, when the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate will meet to elect their respective leaders. These two elections will show whether a majority (and which majority) is now emerging. The President of the

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