

Short guide to the main Italian political forces involved in the coming election

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Berlusconi Partito della Liberta/ Lega Nord

Berlusconi, who precipitated the end of the Monti government by withdrawing his support, has managed to get an agreement with the Lega Nord which is a rightist populist force in favour of independence of most of Northern Italy – Padania. The latter had been in a big crisis due to falling electoral support and corruption scandals involving the historic leader Bossi and his entourage. Berlusconi's manoeuvres have resulted in a fragmentation of his party, the PDL (the party of liberty). He has been omnipresent on all his TV networks and is demagogically opposing some of the austerity measures that he had formerly supported as well as taking a more anti-European stance. He has even stated that he would be happy not to be the prime minister again. He realises he is very unlikely to defeat Bersani so is interested above all to be a 'player' in the post-election manoeuvres, he is talking about a wide pact including the PD. Of course he has ulterior motives, it helps his legal situation and his business empire if he is in parliament with a group. His latest outrageous statement made on Holocaust memorial day (!) is that Mussolini did some good things apart from the racial laws.

Monti has formed his own coalition linking up with traditionally centrist forces like Casini and his UDC (Union of the Democratic centre). Despite being strongly advised by perceptive commentators such as La Repubblica editor Scalfaro not to get his hands dirty in party politics because his great political usefulness was that he was not formally a member of the political caste, he has nonetheless allowed his name to be used for this coalition and is currently attacking both left and right of centre forces. He would like to limit the size of any Bersani victory. If Monti picks up a reasonable score (say 10% plus) and Berlusconi manages to reassemble his electoral base to some degree then Bersani will be more constrained. In any case Bersani has consistently said he wants a government of all the progressive forces, all the pro-Europeans.

Partito Democratico/Socialismo, Ecologia e Liberta

Bersani's PD is in alliance with Vendola's SEL. The SEL is one of the remnants of the old Rifondazione Comunista. Like all the other components to the left of the PD it lost its parliamentary representatives in the last general elections in the debacle of the Rainbow coalition. Vendola has a high public visibility as the governor of the Puglia region and as Italy's best known gay politician. His party opposed Monti's austerity but is now in close alliance with one of its main supporters. Bersani went through a two round primary election in which over 3 million people voted. He defeated Renzi, Florence's mayor and the leader of the modernising even more rightist wing of the PD. Vendola also participated getting a respectable 18% on the first round. The candidates on the PD/SEL slate were also mostly selected via primaries. It is also the only slate that does not have a person's name on the ticket which as Bersani has correctly pointed out says something about the state of Italian politics. All the polls currently suggest Bersani will be the winner of the elections. He has already indicated on many occasions that he sees a role for Monti in a future PD led government and has reassured international capital in newspaper interviews that the PD would be guarantor of stability and sensible economic management.

Beppe Grillo - Movimento Cinque Stelle

A few months ago the polls were giving his movement around 18% of the vote. This appears to be reducing to something like a third of that but is likely that he will have representatives in the new parliament. Everything is reduced with Grillo to democratic questions and protocols for preventing a political caste forming. So his programme is all about rules concerning salaries, expenses, the number of periods in office you can have, opposition to slate systems. Alongside that is the modernising myth about how the internet revolutionises politics and breaks up the political castes. For example all his candidates were selected through online votes. However as the movement has grown inevitably the lack of normal political structures has led to bitter internal disputes where elected representatives have been purged and occasionally subjected to misogynist attack – one councillor was accused of wanting to go on the TV a lot because it was like her ‘g’ spot. The internet organisational system also lends itself very well to his rather authoritarian methods since he controls the website. Undoubtedly there does seem to be a social base for this tendency as the traditional networks of the left workers parties and trade unions have become weaker and the numbers of young people who spend longer and longer trying to get into a stable job grows.

Ingroia - Rivoluzione civile

Ingroia is an investigative judge (a bit like a district attorney in US terms) who has been involved in a struggle against the Sicilian mafia. He is following the example of Di Pietro, the leader of the IdV (Italy of Values) who is also part of this coalition, by going from law into politics. The concerns of the labour movement are consequently put more into the background. The other components of this coalition are another remnant of Rifondazione, the PRC (they kept the name) led by Ferrero who has taken an anti-austerity line although on a local level often governs in PD coalitions. The PdCI led by Diliberto was previously in Rifondazione but left in a split well before the final break up. It was in an electoral federation with Ferrero but had broken with it over the PdCI’s willingness to look for an alliance with the PD. Then along came the opportunity with Ingroia and so they are all back together. The Greens are also in this coalition and like the other party components see it as the main way of getting back into parliament. Interestingly the overwhelming majority of the original signatories to the Cambiare si puo appeal voted against the final Ingroia project after it had been taken over by the parties. There was a majority of online votes in favour of it though. Many people think it will break up once the elections are over. It is unclear whether it will pass the 4% threshold and current polls see it oscillating around that figure. Some of the issues involved in trying to set up this coalition are not dissimilar to issues here in the Britain about how to democratically organise such processes and the relationship between even small scale party apparatuses and the non-aligned.

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