

Italy: The Breakdown of the Political Framework

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The results of the Italian general elections which took place on 4 March seem to confirm the breakdown of the previous political framework, which had already occurred in other countries such as Spain, France and partly also in Germany.

In Italy, the two contenders for power over the last 20 years, the centre left and centre right, have been hit by popular discontent, and the two camps' supporting axes have emerged reduced in size.

A north-south divide

The discontent has expressed itself differently within the territory. On the one hand, the north: with its functional productive and industrial sector, but increasingly impoverished and insecure, voters in this part of the country tended to cast their vote for the right and the Lega Nord (Northern League). By doing so, people incorporate their rising individualist and racist resentment into their anti-establishment protest.

On the other hand, the south: due to high levels of poverty and job insecurity people frequently voted for the MoVimento 5 Stelle (Five Star Movement). This party has broken with both the centre right (which the Lega Nord has been part of too) and the centre left. It has seen the situation unresolved and sees growing emigration as a consequence to poverty and a lack of future prospects. The vote reached by the Five Star Movement, however, also shows us that the party is now rooted in the Italian political scene. It is no longer just an expression of a protest vote, but is widely seen as a possible government alternative. Also considering the fact that both the PD (Democratic Party) and the centre right have represented the political decisions made so far, many look to them for potential change.

Dire prospects for the left

The efforts of the centre-left to reconstruct an option for its voters were not crowned with success. The PD crisis and the fact that prominent characters left the party are to blame for its weak result, which lies just slightly above the electoral threshold. Comparing the 2013 and 2018 political elections, Renzi's party has lost 2,613,891 votes in absolute terms, which corresponds to a loss of 30.2% (data: Istituto Cattaneo).

But this crisis does not correspond with a growth of the radical left either, which stops at 1.1% with the list of Potere al Popolo (Power to the People). It must be acknowledged that this list tried to get an alternative left proposal back on track in a very short space of time. However, it was unable to halt the anti-establishment drive represented by the Five Star Movement and the fear that the Berlusconi - Renzi axis could be the basis for the future government.

On the right, this solution was so unpopular that it caused the Lega to overtake Forza Italia (Berlusconi's party) for the first time in the coalition (17.5% vs. 14.1%), while to the left, it resulted

in the Five Star Movement receiving full consent, going from 2013's 25.5% to today's 32.6%. What remains is a lack of a majority in a three-way system. Each solution could be challenged in the short term. In the meantime, while waiting for someone to be appointed to form a new government, a government remains in office that does not have a parliament to fall back on.

A difficult path ahead

A difficult path opens up for the left. Renzi has expressed his desire to step back as the Secretary of the Democratic Party, however, he holds on to an internal majority within his party that is unlikely to bring about new strategic decisions for the future. For those who expected a better electoral result for the left which would help to reconstruct the centre left, the result is disappointing: it leads to a complex situation and to an even more difficult relationship with the PD.

For Potere al Popolo, on the other hand, the beginning of a productive founding phase seems possible. At the national assembly convened for 18 March, it hopes to revitalise a left-wing proposal to make many voters come back who did not consider this list a real option. All actors involved, however, must count on the Mayor of Naples Luigi de Magistris entering the fray on 10 March. He intends to present a list proposal for the European elections alongside Varoufakis, opening a new element of confusion and fragmentation in the radical left.

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