

Opinions on the Italian elections

Marina Melchionda (April 16, 2008)



Political elections in Italy: some confirmations...but many surprising results

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If somebody asked me what I did yesterday, I would say: "I watched television". And I think this might have been the answer 90% of Italians would have given. At 3 p.m. the official count of votes started in the polling stations and, no matter what button of your remote control you pressed, all you could watch on television were journalists and commentators expressing their own predictions on the results of the political elections. And, as many Italians did, I listened to what they had to say trying to formulate my own opinion on the issue.

The upgrades provided by the Ministry of the Interiors contradicted some of the most common expectations.

First of all, the voting participation was much higher than most of us would have thought: although a 4% decline in voters was registered compared to the last political elections, the fact that 80.5% of registered voters went and voted shows that the appeals that many showmen have launched in the last few months for boycotting the elections as a sign of mistrust towards Italian politicians have failed. Italians did not forget that voting is both a right and a duty: going to the ballot boxes, they showed great civic responsibility.

Most of the results did not surprise me. I was almost convinced Silvio Berlusconi would have become our new Prime Minister: he conducted an excellent electoral campaign promising a long series of tax reductions and remedies to shaky economy. Most of the votes he has gained come from the South of Italy, where unemployment and economic discomfort afflict a larger portion of the population.

Moreover it did not surprise me that in Campania, the region where I live, Berlusconi's coalition won the confidence of 50% of the electors: most of the representatives of local government here, linked to the defeated Partito Democratico guided by Veltroni, are considered to be responsible for the huge garbage crisis that has afflicted the whole region throughout the year. Plus, the presence of Alleanza Nazionale in Berlusconi's coalition seems to reassure people that something will be done to provide greater security to citizens, since the party has always based its campaign on the struggle to fight criminality and illegal immigration.

So, these were some of the results I could predict. On the other hand, some others did surprise me, and not in a positive way.

First of all, the complete defeat of the Sinistra Arcobaleno (the Italian left coalition) - which did not gain a single seat in Parliament - and the loss of the traditional great consensus enjoyed in Liguria by the centre - left, nowadays represented by the Partito Democratico, seems to show a deep loss of support towards the Italian Left parties, by which low-income classes do not feel to be supported and/or protected anymore. The absence of a charismatic leader - even though Veltroni has proven to be more popular than his precursor Prodi - and an electoral campaign lacking great promises for the poorest, has attracted traditional left electors towards Berlusconi's much more amusing programs. The way the Partito Democratico will perform its new role as "opposition" in the new Parliament and its capacity to promote the reforms needed and asked by its electorate will be of fundamental importance in the optic of rebuilding confidence among Italian left-oriented voters.

Well, the results of these elections didn't leave me with only these thoughts. Something has really disturbed my feelings as an Italian: the Lega, the secessionist party, member of Berlusconi's coalition, has gained 10% of the votes.

The first thing that came to my mind is the phrase Massimo D'Azeglio, a former Italian politician, pronounced when Italy got re-unified: Others built the country, we have to create a nation.

It is clear to everybody that the problems troubling the South - criminality, poverty, social disorders and unemployment - are deepening the gap with the much richer and industrialized northern regions. What is not clear is what happened to the sense of nationality evoked by D'Azeglio more than a century ago. Is it true that our sense of fraternity and the traditional Italian vocation of helping each other as in a family is disappearing, frustrated by a new individualism and self-consciousness? It is true that international economic competition is pushing northern citizens to operate a kind of Darwinian selection trying to leave behind everything that might stop or challenge their progress and wealth, as the South might?

As the results of the elections have been diffused only a day ago, we can not of course tell right away to what extent the Lega will be able to influence Berlusconi's government. The fact that the new President intends to nominate Bossi, the Lega's leader, as the new Minister of Institutional Reforms, is not exactly encouraging.

Nothing is left to do other than observe the course of events...and hope that the promises made in the electoral campaign to Southern Italy will be not forgotten in the name of a strong and stable



coalition with a northern party.

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