

Italy's political system is on the brink of dramatic pulverisation

by Blog Admin

Michele Prospero writes that the Italian political system is increasingly vulnerable to the onslaught of a myriad of anti-political and populist candidates that are completely incapable of guaranteeing governability. The only remaining stable anchor is the Democratic Party (PD).



Italian politics is currently going through a phase of extreme instability. Every political area appears to be in movement and it is extremely difficult to foresee what such feverish upheaval will lead to. Berlusconi's party which, for the past twenty years, under a variety of names, has played a hegemonic role in the country has now fallen into severe difficulties. The plan of transforming a personal/company-type party into a fully-fledged political subject based on independent organisational logic has now visibly failed. Consequently, the right wing is experiencing a complete political and organisational break-up.

Following his conviction, Berlusconi has recovered his tone of furious populist revolt against the separation of powers and the European technocracies. The impression one has, however, is that the bitterness of his invective against the euro, the judges, etc. masks the considerable political weakness of a now disarmed leader. Apart from a desperate attempt to rally around him a group of unshakable followers, Berlusconi does not seem to be equipped for carrying on. His political entourage is divided, lacking in strategy and troubled by internal factional struggles. The shattering of his party into a thousand fragments appears, therefore, as an increasingly concrete possibility.

With the code of populism the right wing anxiously embarks on a path that can only lead to marginalisation. Berlusconi's traditional ally, the Lega Nord, is also in the midst of a tough battle for survival and it is difficult to imagine the old right wing coalition playing any key role in the medium term. This does not mean, however, that in Italy right wing sensitivity no longer exists. Such a sentiment remains widespread, in fact, but is currently awaiting other political propositions, since those existing have become rusty.

A large part of the old right wing social coalition, meanwhile, is diverting its rebellious consensus towards the movement of the comedian Beppe Grillo and his Five Star Movement. This phenomenon confirms that a large segment of what, in the immediate future, is destined to become the orphaned electorate of Berlusconiism does not appear to be at all attracted by strategies of normalisation under the banner of reasonable moderatism. The social class that is most sensitive to the revolt against over-taxation and to the appeals of micro-localism (small enterprises, freelancers, etc.) does not seem to diverge from the condition of extreme political alienation in which it has been for the past twenty years, and for this reason it looks to Grillo as the possibility of protest promising new solutions.



Ideas for replacing the coalition cemented by Berlusconi with new civil lists promoted by entrepreneurs

under the banner of efficiency and modernisation (Montezemolo) have proved to be extremely fragile and unrealistic in the face of the real nature of the political alienation that has influenced the huge industrial middle class that rejects tax morale and the shrinking of the underground black market economy. Rather than achieving success in the old Berlusconi feud, these attempts on the part of new entrepreneurs or technocrats seem destined to flood the already vast area of the moderate centre-right. Indeed this moderate centre-right itself, which is responsible for putting an end to bipolar dialectics by breaking up Berlusconi's heterogeneous coalition, finds itself in a situation of blatant strategic uncertainty.

There are no sound alternatives as far as the need to build a common path with the left wing, but the centre-right repeatedly obscures this inescapable strategic fact through a tactical 'movementist' approach that clouds the issue and favours the proliferation of sterile discussions that risk weakening the medium-term plan. In this fraying system the only stable anchor is the Democratic Party (PD). Its role in promoting system centrality is confirmed by the evolution of a precarious political framework that is coming apart at the seams. If it manages to overcome the hurdle of the primary elections unscathed (in which the anti-political and populist approach of the mayor of Florence, Matteo Renzi, risks causing all the system's remaining stability to crumble), the PD will be able to reorganise on more substantial foundations a political system that will otherwise be left vulnerable and exposed to the winds of a dramatic pulverisation.

In a competition scenario that privileges other lines of demarcation (political/anti-political) than the classic European lines (right/left), the PD remains the only organised subject capable of realigning Italian politics within the framework of a system whose confines, players and barriers are all to be redefined. The proposal of a legislative agreement between the left wing and the sectors of constitutional moderatism is the only valid way to heal a system that otherwise risks becoming ossified by the onslaught of a myriad of anti-political and populist candidates that are completely incapable of guaranteeing governability.

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