

Foreign Press & Electoral Victory of Silvio Berlusconi

Maria Rita Latta (April 16, 2008)



There's an evident coldness in the foreign press in response to the electoral victory of Silvio Berlusconi...

The Spanish conservative [El Mundo](#) [2] is one of the few European papers giving a positive opinion on the result of the Italian vote. The French [Le Monde](#) [3], the English [Times](#) [4] and the German [Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung](#) [5] and many others published articles summarizing what happened in Italy and the problems the new government is going to face, expressing not a negative opinion about the new Italian Premier.

The American press, too, is particularly harsh and the common characteristic of all the comments on the Italian elections is the description of the country in decay and the odd behavior of our politicians,

mainly of the new head of the government, Silvio Berlusconi.

In the [Los Angeles Times](#) [6] Tracy Wilkinson portrays the Belpaese in an article with a rather direct title: "In Italy, crime pays and may get you elected." The journalist presents a country at the point of no return and in deep crisis. Silvio Berlusconi is seen as a leader heading "a slate that includes his physiotherapist and an unrepentant Fascist, as well as several center-right women who Berlusconi said last week were 'surely prettier' than leftist women. Among them is one of the voluptuous dancers normally featured in skimpy clothing on his television networks."

Ian Fisher, the correspondent from Italy for the [New York Times](#) [7] notices that it is not clear if the Italians "voted for Mr. Berlusconi out of affection or, as many experts said, as the least bad choice after the nation weathered two years of inaction from the fractured center-left." With Berlusconi, defined by Fisher as an "idiosyncratic billionaire" at the head of the government, "Italy returns to a singular sort of personal politics with Mr. Berlusconi as the unquestioned protagonist." Ian Fisher states that "the election — called just two years after Mr. Berlusconi lost to Mr. Prodi — was considered one of the least exciting in memory, with many Italians doubting that either candidate could accomplish any meaningful change." Though, there is a little hope: "In some basic ways, the election signaled a decisive shift in a nation whose politics have been unstable because of the narrow interests of its many small parties. Mr. Veltroni, heading the new Democratic Party, the result of a merger of the two largest center-left parties, had refused to run with far-left parties, as Mr. Prodi had done."

In the [Wall Street Journal](#) [8], Matthew Kaminski sees the results of the vote in Italy as a "convincing victory" of Berlusconi's party. Though, there is something different in the attitude of the winner, defined as a "flamboyant businessman-turned-politician who was his old self at his final campaign rally — embracing former Playboy model and neofascist pol Alessandra Mussolini (Benito's granddaughter) with cheers of "Andiamo! Andiamo" (Let's go!). In Kaminski's opinion this time "Berlusconi didn't look to have his heart in this race. His platform was far less ambitious than in the past." This attitude, this "lack of enthusiasm or outrage — by Italian standards — about a third Berlusconi turn in the prime minister's residence at Palazzo Chigi speaks not to political maturity but fatalism. The country's problems are seemingly too grave, and the available leaders too weak to tackle them seriously. Fourteen years ago, in springing onto the political scene, the man who gave Italy commercial television — to this day his greatest legacy — promised big changes. Italians believed him. They were disillusioned." For the WSJ "Italian political observers assume that Mr. Berlusconi mainly wants to use this latest spin in office to win the country's ceremonial and headache-free presidency, and claim keys to the rare house in Italy he can't buy for himself, Rome's Palazzo del Quirinale. "What a pleasant surprise," concludes the WSJ, "one ventures even for his detractors, were Mr. Berlusconi suddenly to have grander ambitions for himself and his country."

Sarah Delaney, too, in the [Washington Post](#) [9], defines Berlusconi a "flamboyant billionaire politician," and describes Italy as a country having to face an uncertain future because of the hard economic crisis. Telling the history of Berlusconi's past as Premier, the journalist refers in particular to "Berlusconi's last term, which ended in May 2006, and was marked by repeated gaffes and unsuccessful criminal prosecutions of the prime minister in connection with his business dealings. 'The rest of Europe will just roll its eyes, sigh and say, 'Here we go again,' but there's nothing they



can do about it," said John Harper, a professor of political science at the Bologna branch of Johns Hopkins University. It is frustrating to read here, too, the ironic comments on the future Italian Premier's behavior: "characteristically outspoken, he once accused a German parliamentarian of being a kapo, or Nazi prison guard. He gave a vulgar hand signal over the head of the Spanish foreign minister in a group photo of European ministers. He recently remarked that women on the right of the Italian political spectrum are much better looking than those on the left, and exhorted his female supporters to bake pies and bring them to polling stations."

There is a deep sense of discouragement reading such opinions about Italy and the future leader, who, it is so clear, will have to work hard to rebuild a better reputation for himself and, most importantly, for Italy, especially if the next stage of his political itinerary will be the Palazzo del Quirinale.

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