

Berlusconi and His Crew

E. M. (May 09, 2008)



Prime Minister Berlusconi inaugurates his fourth term and announces his ministerial posts. The choices for his circle of 21 ministers reveal some predictable tactical determinations, while a few of his newbies have yet to prove their political value. No one can accuse the PM of having assembled a boring cast

The 60th Italian government since the end of the Second World War was sworn in on Thursday. In a ceremony led by President Giorgio Napolitano, Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and 21 ministers of his center-right cabinet pronounced a solemn oath on the Italian Constitution. It marks the media tycoon's fourth non-consecutive term as head of government.

Berlusconi's new cabinet rallies figures from various right-wing parties, and among them, many familiar faces. Gianni Letta, the PM's close business and political aide, was named Cabinet Secretary, and according to Berlusconi is "a gift from God to all Italians". [Umberto Bossi](#) [2], famously at the helm of the anti-immigration [Northern League](#) [3] party—a man stalwartly and controversially in

favor of a federalist system that gives greater autonomy to the North—will be minister of reforms. [Roberto Calderoli](#) [4], also of the Northern League and Berlusconi's former minister of reforms, is now in charge of "simplification" (in other words, simplifying the Parliament and reducing its costs). Calderoli is best known in the media for having upset Muslims when he proposed pigs be brought in to discourage plans for the construction of a new mosque in Bologna and unbuttoning his shirt to reveal underneath, a t-shirt bearing an offensive cartoon of the Prophet Muhammad, setting off violent demonstrations in Libya. He has also been criticized by animal rights organizations for keeping wolves as pets. Roberto Maroni, another Northern league veteran and fierce advocate of federalism, is Minister of the Interior.

[Giulio Tremonti](#) [5] of Berlusconi's People of Liberty/ Forza Italia party, who has served in previous Berlusconi administrations, was re-cast as Finance Minister. He is a university lecturer long in favor of tax-cutting and most recently delivered a speech on the dangers of globalization. The National Alliance party's Ignazio La Russa is the new Minister of Defense, and curiously, has a predilection for Native American culture, naming his sons Geronimo, Lorenzo Cochise and Leonardo Apache.

The cabinet's four women include the youngest of the pack, Giorgia Meloni. At 31 she is

Youth Minister, while [Stefania Prestigiacomo](#) [6], frequently in the media spotlight by way of her feminist proclivities and blonde good looks, was named Minister for the Environment. Although former Miss Italia contestant and Maxim cover girl [Mara Carfagna](#) [7], whose Google image search yields more thongs than pantsuits, could probably give Ms. Prestigiacomo a run for her money. Berlusconi appointed Carfagna Minister for Equal Opportunities and has said of her "she is beautiful inside and outside". The more muted Maria Stella Gelmini, a defender of family values who is close to the Catholic Church, is Minister of Education.

The varied cast of characters will join Berlusconi at the first cabinet meeting in Naples early next week. The choice is symbolic of Berlusconi's promise to resolve the embattled city's trash crisis, which has lately prompted the European Commission to file a lawsuit against Italy for improper waste disposal.

Walter Veltroni, the center-left Democratic Party's leader, responded to Berlusconi's cabinet appointments by forming his own "shadow government". The 21 officials on his side include nine women and as Veltroni put it, "will serve as an instrument of opposition to the actions of the Berlusconi government and bring about alternative solutions".



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