

Country report: Italy

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Saturday March 2, 2019, two hundred thousand people hit the streets of Milan, demonstrating against racism. This was the first mass rally that took place in Italy against the populist government composed by the Northern League and the Five Star Movement, exactly one year after the political elections. More than 1.200 associations from the civil society adhered to the march and gathered under the general motto "People first", a motto clearly in opposition with the one of the government, "Italians first". The center-left wing Democratic Party (PD) did not play any role in the organization of the march, nevertheless this last one had a clear effect on the party's leadership elections that were held the day after the demonstration, on Sunday the third of March. Indeed, 1.6 million citizens went to vote to the open primary elections for the PD's leadership, choosing as head of the party Nicola Zingaretti. He was one of the few center-left personalities who resisted to the populist wave, winning, with a large majority, the presidency of the region that has as its capital city Rome.



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In this way, the electoral campaign of the left wing for the electoral elections started. Zingaretti is considered as belonging to the old guard since raised in the Federation of the communist youth of the Italian Communist Party. As such, one of the main results of his success has been to defeat the moderate, "Macronian", faction of the party, led by the former Prime Minister Matteo Renzi and by his former minister of economic development, Carlo Calenda. The last one presented himself as the leader of a "popular front" against the far right, front that should leave out the left. After only one month, a party, such as the PD, that came out broken from last year political elections and with its preferences at the minimal historical level, this party now is given above the Five Star Movement, which is also rapidly losing votes.

The Democratic Party was contested, from the left, because of its continuous running after the right, in particular on issues such as migration and security. The minister of internal affairs, Marco Minniti, one of the "strong men" of the party and himself coming from the Italian Communist Party, was the target of anti-racist movements for the agreements he signed with Libya. These ones made it possible for the center-left government to reduce the numbers of arrivals to the Italian shores, without though ensuring that this would not mean they were detained or tortured in Libyan camps.

The revenge of the old Pd

The victory of Zingaretti has meant the revenge of the "old" PD, the one dating of before Renzi's epoch, the one linked to the family of European socialists. Even though it is difficult to picture Zingaretti as the Italian Bernie Sanders or Jeremy Corbyn, his first act has been the one of an opening to the left. Right after his nominee, the new secretary of the PD has renewed the ties with the group guided by Massimo D'Alema and Francesco Bersani, former leaders of the center-left who left the party as an act of defiance towards Renzi's management, and he did the same with the Green party and the forces of the radical left. Even though he presents himself in continuity with a Party that has backed up European Union's policies of the last thirty years, in his first public speech as a secretary Zingaretti has opened up the party to the "green generation" that demonstrated against climate change, and he promised to take care of "social justice" and of the poverty provoked by the last twenty years of "coarse neo-liberalism". These are apparently contradictory words, since the Democratic Party is the one that approved a law (the so-called Jobs Act) that turned flexibility (and thus precariousness) into the key word for labor policies in Italy, thus eliminating guarantees against arbitrary terminations of contract. Zingaretti's declarations are nevertheless in line with the self-critique of two of his more authoritative supporters, Enrico Letta and Romano Prodi. Both politicians come from the left-wing side of the ancient Christian Democrats and have been Prime Ministers for the Democratic Party. Enrico Letta condemned the "soft populism" of his successor, Matteo Renzi, and Romano Prodi, who is also former President of the European Commission, he wrote in a letter to the magazine L'Espresso that "even the most influent and celebrated world guardians of neo-liberalism today recognize the existence of holes in the progress they announces and the real effects of the policies they have, for so long, put in place".

The first decisions of PD's secretary created some embarrassment within the most moderate area of the party. The critics contested in particular the space given to the movement Piazza Grande, founded by the former mayor of Milan, Giuliano Pisapia, who was also a parliamentary of Rifondazione Comunista, the unitary radical left party, and who was also the legal advisor of the family of Carlo Giuliani, the young demonstrator killed by the Italian Carabinieri at the G8 of Genova in 2001. Pisapia originated the movement

together with Laura Boldrini, former president of the Deputy Chamber at the Italian Parliament, who was one of the preferred targets of the right wing and of the Five Star Movement because of her engagement in favor of the migrants arriving on the shores of the Italian island of Lampedusa. Zingaretti then named two "young sanderists" (from the leader of the American democratic left wing), as the daily newspaper *il manifesto* defined them. One of them was his adjunct at the direction of the Lazio region, Massimiliano Smeriglio, a former militant of the occupied squat La Strada in Rome and former member of Parliament for Rifondazione comunista. Zingaretti himself defined Smeriglio as "the closest person for me and the most important in the last ten years". The list for the European elections, that should go "from Tsipras to Macron", will have as the head of the list Pisapia himself in the North of Italy, and the centrist Carlo Calenda in the Center of Italy. The effect over the electorate, if we trust the polls, has been immediate and unattended. For the first time after the electoral catastrophe of last year, the forecasts give the Democratic Party at **over 20%** of the preferences, a percentage that would be like a breath of fresh air for the Socialist and Democrats at the European Parliament and that could be decisive in the struggle with Eurosceptic forces.

The radical left at the top of Cgil

At the end of January, the balance of forces has changed also in the biggest Italian trade union, the Cgil. The congress elected as secretary general Maurizio Landini, who thus succeeds to Susanna Camusso. Under her leadership, the Cgil strongly opposed the center-left government of Matteo Renzi because of its choice to break the practice of "concertation" through which left wing governments used to consult with trade unions for labor laws. Thus, Camusso contested the Jobs Act, the labor law through which Renzi introduced flexibility in the Italian labor market, and Renzi's minister of labor relations, Giovanni Poletti, a man coming from the network of the "red coops", that is the cooperatives existing in central Italy and being the heritage of the administration of the Italian Communist Party of the regions Tuscany and Emilia Romagna.

The break-up between the Cgil and the PD caused this last one the loss of half of its preferences exactly in the regions of central Italy. In the aftermath of political elections, a year ago, an internal poll of the Cgil detected that 35% of the trade union members voted anyway for the Democratic Party (the Cgil is composed for a large part of public school teachers, workers of the public administration and of retired people, these last ones being the majority), but another 33% gave their preferences to the Five Star Movement, even though this last one campaigned very vocally against trade unions in the name of direct democracy. Ten per cent of those enrolled in the biggest Italian trade union, notoriously left leaning, even voted for the Northern League. They were mainly workers from the industries of Northern Italy, those who once had in their pockets the membership card of the trade union and of the PCI. The new secretary, Landini, shifted the Cgil decidedly to the left, looking precisely at the workers' class that became more and more diffident towards the center-left and the left. Maurizio Landini indeed was secretary general of the Fiom, the powerful federation of the steelworkers, a subgroup of the Cgil itself, and always positioned towards the radical left. Landini worked closely with Claudio Sabattini, who, as the Fiom secretary, theorized that the organization needed to have a political role and not only a right-claiming one.

In 2015, Landini, together with the renowned legal scholar Stefano Rodotà, created the Social Coalition, a network of organizations giving birth to a political form in between a social movement and a trade union. Rather than launching his political career, as everyone expected, the Social Coalition became the basis from which Landini started his escalation of the Cgil leadership. Landini's first public act has been the participation at the strike of the drivers of Amazon in Milan and the visit to the workers of an oil refinery of the Eni that went on fire in Northern Italy.

Landini's strategy is closely scrutinized by the galaxy of the political forces at the left of the Democratic Party, also in the perspective of the European elections and eventually of new political elections if the Northern League-5Star Movement government would break up after May 26. This hypothesis would become very concrete in case voters will punish the Five Star Movement and transfer their votes to the Northern League, who would then become Italy's first party.

The difficulties of a "fourth leftist pole"

The radical left did not benefit from the crisis of the Democratic Party, as it could have been expected instead. Rather, consensus shifted to the Five Star Movement. To the left of the PD the picture is quite different and not less fragmented than five years ago, when the list "L'altra Europa con Tsipras" reunited different groups from the left around the proposal of Alexis Tsipras, leader of Syriza and Greek Prime Minister, as President of the European Commission. "L'altra Europa con Tsipras" gathered Sinistra ecologia e libertà and Rifondazione comunista, until the South Tirol Greens and the small Pirate Party and it obtained three deputies in the Strasbourg Parliament.

The collapse of the Democratic Party opened the possibility of a "fourth pole", beyond the PD, the center-right and the populists of Northern League-5Star Movement (these last two are separate parties at the national level but often run together at local and regional elections). The plan for the "fourth pole" was organized around the figure of Luigi de Magistris, Napoli's major, with his movement Dema, and it should have included Rifondazione comunista, Potere al Popolo (a political group born for the initiative of activists of the neapolitan squat Je so' pazzo at the political elections of March 2018), Diem25 of the former Greek Minister of Finance Yannis Varoufakis, the movement Italia bene comune founded by the major of Parma Federico Pizzarotti (expelled from the 5Star Movement with whom he was elected) and Sinistra italiana (without the former PD members). The aim, De Magistris explained, was to create a unitary list of the left capable of "opening up an alternative to the fake dualism between liberal Europeanists and sovranist populists". The change of direction of the Democratic Party shuffled the cards, though, letting the hypothesis of a red-green left

coalition melt into air. De Magistris pulled back, judging that the bases for the birth of a political force that could compete with the right wing and with center-left without being minoritarian were lacking. At present, the perspective is that, to the right of the PD there will be a list constituted by Italia in comune and the movement +Europa, founded by the former EU Commissioner Emma Bonino (engaged in civic right but liberal in economics) and they will join the liberal group in the European Parliament (Alde). On the other side, there will be a "cartel" that will go the EU elections with the symbol of the European left. Rifondazione comunista, Sinistra italiana, L'altra Europa con Tsipras, Partito del Sud, Convergenza socialista and Transform Italia called for "a list open to all territorial realities, cultural, social, political ones, as well as social movements that want to build a third space with respect to how Europe is and to right-wing nationalists". Potere al popolo, after a failed attempt to merge with the Prc and a series of assemblies in Italian squats, is oriented towards not participating at the European elections. Finally, Diem 25 decided not to participate, while the Greens will run in agreement with Possibile, a small leftist party. Unlike in other European countries, they have little chances of exceeding the 4% quorum and sitting in the European Parliament.

The failure of the Eurosceptics

Last but not least, the hypothesis of a list openly Eurosceptic and from the left, favorable to the Italexit, did not make it. Stefano Fassina, former PD's Member of Parliament, then shifted to Sinistra Italiana, worked in this direction founding the association Patria e Costituzione taking as its model la France Insoumise of Jean Luc Mélenchon (who also participated to a meeting with Potere al popolo in Naples). The left-wing sovranists, even though they gathered some transversal consensus in social movements and some academic and intellectual circles, did not go through. In Italy, those listening to the populist sirens, also from the left, converged in the Five Star Movement. If this last one should shrink, under the weight of the failures of the government, hegemonized by the Northern League and by its leader Matteo Salvini, then new political scenarios could open up. Already a part of the Five Star Movement, reassembled around the President of the Chamber of Deputies, Roberto Fico, is taking its distance from the politics of the government. The European elections, in Italy, will also serve to clarify the future direction of national politics.

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