



Berlusconi at the Helm

(April 15, 2008)



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Media mogul Silvio Berlusconi won a third term as Italy's premier on Monday with a stronger-than-expected mandate to govern.

Centre-left challenger Walter Veltroni conceded defeat in a phone call to 71-year-old Berlusconi after projections based on vote results showed the centre-right chief had gained a solid majority in both the House and the Senate.



Turnout in the vote, which ended at 15:00, was just over 80%. While the figure was high, it was 3.5% down on that posted in the previous.

The election yielded another surprise with the disastrous performance of the Left-Rainbow (SA), a federation of hard-left parties and Greens led by premier hopeful Fausto Bertinotti. The SA has been kicked out of parliament all together after failing to pass the thresholds needed for representation in either the Senate or the House.

It will be the first time that Communist deputies would be absent from Italy's postwar parliament.

Ironically for a system of proportional representation, the election appeared to have eliminated from the scene most of the small parties criticised for creating instability and wielding power that was disproportionate to their size.

Among the movements which failed to gain representation was The Right, a new party led by Francesco Storace which had hoped to win substantial votes from the National Alliance (AN) after the latter's decision to merge into Berlusconi's People of Freedom party (PDL).

The once-mighty Socialist wing will also disappear from the scene after the failure of Socialist Party leader Enrico Boselli to win enough votes.

Apparently only six parties will take up seats in the House this time round: the PDL; the PD; the Northern League, a populist, devolutionist party which is allied to Berlusconi; the tiny Sicilian-based party, Movement for Autonomy (MpA) which is also allied to Berlusconi; Veltroni ally Italy of Values (IDV) led by former anti-graft prosecutor Antonio Di Pietro; and the centrist, Catholic UDC, a former Berlusconi ally.

(Based on ANSA, Rome, April 14)

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