

Reactions to the Italian Election across Europe

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2/27/2013

The Italian election on the weekend 24-25 February was hugely anticipated and the results, though perhaps not surprising, have not brought the decisive clarity that many had hoped for. Briefly we summarise a few observations from the way the election was covered across Europe.

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Greek Press: The Greek press is covering the event with alarmist titles about the danger of political chaos in Italy and its implications for European stability using titles such as ‘[thriller elections](#)’ (To Vima) and ‘[Italy shakes unstable Europe](#)’ (Kathimerini). Center-left newspapers tend to note the anxiety and terror caused in Brussels and Berlin and interpret the rise of populist leaders like Grillo and Berlusconi as nemesis to the German-imposed austerity. Center-right newspapers tend to be more reserved in their anti-German sentiments and refer to the negative reaction of the markets and the dangers from the rise of populist politicians.

German Press: The election is the news of the week in Germany receiving much alarmist coverage. The press seems to be deeply concerned with the outcome outlining political chaos, warning of the woes of further credit rating downgrades, noting market decline and the FAZ titling that it is “[to despair for](#).” It appears that the German press views the election outcome as a cause for major concern.

French Press:

French coverage of the election, in the mainstream press at least, has so far been less alarmist than elsewhere. First of all, regarding the electoral stalemate, there is some sense of *plus ça change*. If the elections have shown Italy to be “ungovernable”, as [Le Monde](#) and [Libération](#) among others have described it, for [some](#) this is not just a product of the current crisis but rather an on-going symptom of a post-war constitutional settlement favouring political instability over the concentration of power. Much attention has of course been paid to the phenomenon of Beppe Grillo and his Five Star Movement (and to responses elsewhere such as Peer Steinbrück’s controversial remarks). A degree of uncertainty comes across as to whether the results mark the rise of an anti-European populism, threatening to the European political mainstream and encouraging for domestic political figures like Jean-Luc Mélenchon, or rather a rejection of the politics of austerity and therefore something rather more compatible with François Hollande’s political positioning in response to the euro crisis.

Italian press:

Less than 48 hours after the electoral contest, the analysis of the vote in the Italian press, perhaps understandably given the magnitude of the political shift, is still pretty much concentrated on the surprising rise of the Five Star Movement (Beppe Grillo), together with the Berlusconi’s capability to resist the collapse.

This morning several newspapers have indeed published ([linkiesta](#), [Corriere della Sera](#)) a demoscopic analysis of the voting patterns, which highlights how 16 million people have change their preference from the last election, with Berlusconi and his Nortehren League allies losing about half of the votes, particularly in the North and North East, and the centre-left losing about a third of the votes. Grillo’s movement has become the first party with about 8.7 million votes, an astonishing result considering that this was its first nation-wide election, and that the movement programmatically refuses engagement with mainstream media, and relies almost exclusively on the Internet.

At the moment, there is still no detailed discussion of what will happen next. The situation is extremely complex, as any government needs a vote of confidence from both the Camera dei Deputati (lower house) and the Senato (upper house), but, because of the electoral law, there is no centre-left majority in the Senato. So even if the centre-left coalition has technically won the election, there is little chance to have a stable government in the next future.

Berlusconi seems to be open to the possibility of a “große Koalition” (grand coalition) with the centre-left, which they are refusing at the moment. Everything is now in the hands of the President of the Republic. The issue is however: the President cannot call for new elections and dissolve the Parliament in the last six months of his mandate, which is now the case. The newly elected parliament must then elect a new President of the Republic. But first Italy needs some sort of government, which will probably be born out of numerous, still difficult to imagine compromises, and posed to last for a limited time, just in order to drag the country to the next elections.

In the press, a detailed analysis of the international implications of the Italian instability is still undeveloped. This does not come as a surprise, as the Italian press has traditionally paid very limited attention to international, even European politics. Some more attention, albeit still limited, is paid to the markets and their negative reaction to the political news from Italy.

One of the most interesting contribution so far for an analysis of the vote has appeared under the name of Ernesto Galli della Loggia, allegedly one of Italy’s leading public intellectuals, in today’s Corriere della Sera. [Galli della Loggia attempts to clarify the meaning of the concept of “populism”](#), possibly in response to criticism and recommendations which have been repeatedly addressed to Italy, particularly from the European establishment.