

## Conte-von der Leyen bilateral meeting for Italy's commissioner

Ursula von der Leyen has met in Rome with Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte. The roman stop concluded the tour of the main capitals of the Old Continent with which the former Defense Minister of Germany aims to lay the foundations for the composition of the next Commission and to refine the program in view of the formal kick-off of the next legislature, in autumn. The final negotiation for the definition of her team will only take shape after mid-August. In the last two weeks, the president-elect of the European Commission has travelled to Berlin, Paris and Madrid also to close ranks of the pro-European front and shore up her fragile majority in view of November, when it comes to lay hands on the ambitious political agenda assembled in great haste in July to get the approval of the Strasbourg hemicycle. In addition to visiting the capital of the main Member States, Ms. von der Leyen has met also with the heads of State and government of Poland, Hungary and Czech Republic, countries that have proved decisive together with Italy to block the rise of the socialist candidate Frans Timmermans at the presidency of the Commission. For von der Leyen the first challenge to be won will be the composition of a college of commissioners characterized by equality between men and women. The official applications received until to now draw a still precarious equilibrium, with 11 names of men and nine of women. For many, her recent experience at the helm of the German military apparatus is a factor likely to pave the way for the adoption of a General Directorate dedicated to Defense within the EU. A possible

step at least on paper, although it is unlikely that it will lead to the birth of the European army suggested in recent months by the presidents of Germany and France. It is therefore easier that EU programs and funds for this specific area develop capabilities that are complementary to NATO's priority or aimed at seeing up low-profile missions in Europe's neighbourhood. President von der Leyen's visit to Italy is of interest also because the issue of the Italian commissioner in Brussels has become another topic of confrontation between coalition partners. If the outcome of the European elections seemed to have put the name of the commissioner in the hands of the League, the revelations of the so-called Russiagate and the rising tensions over divisive dossiers such as the TAV high-speed rail link and judiciary reform have in fact jeopardised everything. Not to mention the decisive support provided by the M5S to the election of von der Leyen in Strasbourg. Prime minister Conte reiterated that our country aspires to a leading economic portfolio, even if at the moment there is no certainty about the names put forward by League and M5S. after last day's stalemate and the official withdrawal of State undersecretary Giorgetti, Garavaglia (Economy Deputy Minister), Fontana (European Affairs), Bongiorno (Public Administration) and Tremonti are still in the running. Still, for the Vice-President of the European Parliament Castaldo (M5S), Italy should propose a neutral candidate, bearing in mind that Brussels might reject a political candidate to punish the League opposition to the election of von der Leyen.