

The ruling coalition's ballet over the statute of limitations

The ballet on the statute of limitations that has gripped the ruling coalition for weeks shows the existence of a dual battle over the parties' idealism and above all their positioning needs in the Italian political arena. The last chapter of the dispute was staged on Thursday, when a Council of ministers meeting deserted by Renzi's two female ministers Bellanova and Bonetti decided to insert the so-called "Iodo Conte bis" compromise in the criminal trial reform bill. With all due respect to Renzi's requests, who had asked for the postponement of a year of the Bonafede reform on the statute of limitations, the agreement backed by M5S, PD and LEU now establishes a distinction between condemned and acquitted: only the former will be exempt from the statute of limitations' benefits. A real provocation for Italy's former premier and ex-PD secretary, who had previously managed to prevent his allies from including the contested reform into an amendment to the 'Milleproroghe' decree. Waiting to know the next moves of the contenders (premier Conte would be in fact mulling how to disarm Renzi's MPs in the balkanized Senate, perhaps widening the perimeter of the ruling coalition to some centrist backers), some reflections are still legitimate. The row that sees Renzi and the M5S one against each other is yet another display of the eternal clash between the so-called protectors of civil liberties, who defend the statute of limitations in order to be able to subtract the indicted from the nightmare of endless trials, and the so-called corruption bashers, who argue instead that in doing so many criminals would escape

the sword of justice. The fact is that along with clashes of principle there are also the much more prosaic demands of political positioning. Proof of this is the M5S' bitter defense of yet another flagship measure of its ruling experience, as well as Renzi's attempts to exorcise the tiny 4% collected so far in polls with an assertive attitude towards the 5-Star partner. In the middle sits the PD, which on one side calls Renzi's Italia Viva group to come to terms with its ruling coalition allies and on another seems totally aligned with the M5S on the statute of limitations' reform. A measure that among other things would cancel the current Orlando law, which bears the name of the PD former justice minister. More than anything else, for the PD there is perhaps the will to isolate Renzi in order to expose his political ambitions, even at the cost of offering a crucial foothold to the M5S in a time marked by its persistent internal crisis. However, it is difficult for the ruling coalition parties to really want to break up: there are still 400 public appointments to decide, while the option of snap elections has to deal with the need of give way to the popular referendum for cutting MPs' numbers. Even the no confidence vote evoked by Renzi against Bonafede risks turning into a double-edged sword. In fact, if Parliament were able to protect the M5S' justice minister this would only confirm the existence of another ruling coalition capable of surviving without Renzi. These MPs would come from the ranks of Forza Italia, other centrist groups and even from pieces of Italia Viva, on which Renzi no longer seems to have absolute control.