

Coronavirus freezes Italian politics

The news that Parliament will only be open on Wednesday in March is the plastic representation of how the coronavirus emergency ultimately triggered the paralysis of all national political activity. And while in Italy the epidemic exacerbates crucial issues – from the relationship between the central state and regions to the fragility of the most productive areas, or the dramatic aging of the Italian population – the advent of the inactivity period seems capable of bringing with it also a minimum of stability to a otherwise quarrelsome and balkanized party system. Proof of this is, for example, the peace signed on the fiery dossier of the public appointments after weeks and weeks of grueling negotiations. A few days before the decisive meetings to establish how to proceed in the renewal of the top management of the seven major investee companies, the fact that the government appears to have decided to confirm the senior managers of ENI, ENEL, Leonardo, Poste, MPS, Terna and ENAV is striking. This is due to the more detached relationship between the parties and the galaxy of former public participations, as well as, perhaps, the fact that the coronavirus emergency advises ruling and opposition parties – which are otherwise engaged in a permanent electoral campaign – not to jeopardize the stability of Italy's national champions, all listed on the stock exchange. On the fragile and armed truce signed in the face of the emergency has weighted the appeal to the sense of responsibility launched by Head of State Sergio Mattarella, who spoke at the height of a period in

which reality and science had stopped counting, as well as marked by mass psychosis and communicative hypertrophy. Meanwhile, the coronavirus became an excuse to justify decisions that have little or nothing to do with the epidemic. After having debated for months of fiscal austerity and respect for European budget rules, the emergency has in fact provided new arguments to the Italian battle against Brussels for the relaxation of budgetary constraints. Hence the appeals of the productive world for rescue operations, which have activated immediately the national institutions. The government is preparing to launch an extraordinary allocation of 7.5 billion euros to support the economy, with interventions in three main fields: strengthening of the public health service, civil protection and security forces; income support measures and expansion of social safety nets; support to companies based in the territories and sectors most affected. As well as a moratorium on corporate loans by the banking system. Billions of euros of investments that in the current economic and ideological context, totally focused on reducing the debt and the role of the state, are going to assume an almost heroic character. Much will also depend on Berlin's attitude. As long as the Germans fear the new migration crisis on the Greek-Turkish border more than the epidemic, they will hardly agree budget concessions to Italy. Finally a question: when the emergency is over, are we supposed to go back talking about fiscal austerity measures as if nothing has ever happened?