

Berlusconi seeks to exploit the ruling coalition's fault lines

Behind the green light of former center-left premier Romano Prodi to the entry of Silvio Berlusconi in the ruling coalition there's the need to avoid snap elections whatever happens in autumn, when the socio-economic effects of Covid-19 and the political repercussions of regional elections could put a strain on the M5S-PD government. The approach of the election day on September 21-21 for the renewal of seven out of twenty regional governors (Veneto, Campania, Tuscany, Liguria, Marche, Puglia and Valle d'Aosta) is increasing tension that lacerates the ruling coalition and contributes to paralyze government activity. In addition to the everlasting issue related to the management of the new Genoa bridge, which exploded again during the course of the last week almost two years after the disaster, on the horizon there is the crucial European Council of July 17 on the EU budget and recovery plan: the risk that EU Mediterranean countries will find themselves without liquidity in September is real, even more so if not a single step forward has been made with regard to financing arrangements compared to last spring's talks. The Northern front led by the Netherlands is immovable: it continues to oppose non-repayable grants, not even those that would actually be collected through the issuance of a common debt and in addition it wants to control how the money will be actually spent. Hence the urgent need to organize Prime Minister Conte's visit to Spain and Portugal, to strengthen relations with allies, and then to Holland, to try to appease the Rutte government. The story lends itself to different kinds of consideration and places more than one

question mark between the financial needs of a country in blatant difficulty such as Italy and the actual availability of EU resources to support the recovery. At the same time, it reiterates the urgency to end the great debate that rages only in Italy on the European bailout fund (ESM), available immediately but with funds for loans (albeit under almost zero conditions) and so radicalized as to originate harsh infighting in the ruling coalition and within the M5S itself. In this context fits Berlusconi's offer, who reiterated full support in case of a parliamentary vote on ESM: "for the good of the country", said Italy's former premier and center-right leader, although the attempt to create the conditions for an institutional collaboration between the ruling coalition and his Forza Italia party cannot be excluded. Berlusconi has literally sunk in terms of popular consensus, although he still controls 95 deputies and 59 senators in Parliament – a force to be reckoned in the eyes of the ruling coalition and especially in the Senate, where it lost several senators in recent months. Above all there is the possibility of giving substance also in Italy to the so-called 'Ursula majority', the one that a year ago elected the president of the European Commission and which could represent the only possible alternative to current PD-M5S alliance that supports Premier Conte's Cabinet. Without exposing to the risk of snap general elections and along the lines of what Mr Prodi and other ex-Italian head of government wished for: an institutional collaboration of the moderate and pro-European parties in order to counter the return to power of populist and anti-European forces.