

The Captain in danger of shipwreck

A geological era seems to have passed since last year's hectic August 7, when in the Senate the ruling M5S filed a motion against the high-speed rail TAV which in a few hours would sanction the definitive rupture among the two populist backers of the first Conte Cabinet. "Instant change or elections" said on that occasion Italy's Interior Minister and League leader Matteo Salvini – who was at that stage the undisputed star of the Legislature and probably the country's most popular and most discussed political figure. He had been able to take the reins of a party in deep crisis at the end of 2013 – when the League was pinned to a paltry 4 percent, just to bring it to last year's European election crushing 34 percent: a result that would have sealed once and for all the new balance of power in the ruling coalition. The result was also a consequence of Salvini's tireless proselytism activity conducted up to that moment in every corner of Italy and his aspiration to intercept the perceived desire for change of Italians. See in retrospect, therefore, it was a frenetic race under the sun, animated by the certainty of being able to give the final push to his trembling ruling ally and to break once and for all with the M5S' thousand "nay" on TAV high speed rail, TAP pipeline, Ilva plant, incinerators, Regional autonomies and so on. All the more so when several polls gave the League an attractive 39 percent in the popular ratings and as many as seven out of ten electors would have been in favor of returning to the polls. "I ask Italian, if they fill like it, to give me full powers to do fully what we promised to do, without slowdowns": this was Salvini's definitive point of no return, the phrase that

would mark the beginning of the end for the League leader. From that moment he was unable to break the bitter resistance opposed by Prime Minister Conte, as well as deceived by the desire for snap elections of opposition PD leader Zingaretti (actually a helpless secretary vis-à-vis the powers of the party's big-wigs, who were simply terrified by the idea of returning to polls) and finally protagonists of a misguided attempt to mend relations with his former ally as soon as he fully grasped the implications of the M5S-PD talks. Decisive step towards the failure of the political and media strategy of the League leader and to sanction the opening of a new phase in the Legislature. Which was symbolically inaugurated on August 20, 2019, at Palazzo Madama by the speech of Mr Conte against Salvini himself: a cathartic moment that would have freed the premier from the role of president of two quarrelsome deputy-premiers, to rise once and for all to that of a true Prime Minister able to prevail in the balance of power withing his ruling majority. The rest is political news of the August consultations, which took place relatively smoothly thanks to the stiff aversion of the head of State towards an early return to polls and despite the lukewarm reaction of the Italian public opinion for the M5S-PD parliamentary agreement. Thus remain of the table the comparisons between the before and after the incident: from Salvini's instant-play or the League's failed Blitzkrieg of the past summer to the staid rhythms (for some, almost biblical times) of the current one. From the Papeete fireworks to the seraphic rhythms imposed on the government by prime minister Conte.