European Elections monitor

After Greece Italy now had to appoint a new President of the Republic

Corinne Deloy

Analysis

Abstract :

The President of the Italian Republic resigned on 14th January. This had been expected since Giorgio Napolitano had announced his decision to leave his position as head of State before the end of 2014 to the daily *La Repubblica* on 8th November, which he confirmed in a speech on 18th December. When he was re-elected on 23rd April 2013 Mr Napolitano warned that he would not complete his second mandate which was due to end in 2020. Finally he chose to resign on the day that Latvia took over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union from Italy.

Matteo Renzi, President of the Council asked the President of the Council to remain in office until parliament had approved the voting method that is due bring equal bicameralism to an end (the Italicum law grants a bonus to any party that wins at least 40% of the vote) and the Constitutional reform that provides for a reduction in the powers of the Senate and its transformation into a non-elected assembly. Giorgio Napolitano pointed to his age (he will be 90 on 25th June next) and his fatigue in justification of his retirement.

Indeed Matteo Renzi fears that negotiations to appoint the future President will interfere with the vote on the reform that he wants to introduce. He fears that his government allies in the New Centre Right led by Angelo Alfano, Civic Choice and the Centre Union (UdC) led by Pier Ferdinando Casini will force a candidate upon him in exchange for their support during the vote on reform.

Giorgio Napolitano, who repeats that there was no alternative to the reforms and the country's modernisation has always been an important, sound ally for Matteo Renzi, whom he appointed in February 2014. The President of the Council needs to succeed in pushing through the reform so that he enjoys a strong position in the next general elections. "*The President of the Council needs to have someone in the Presidency of the Republic who can overcome resistance within the parties and who can call early elections before his popularity declines too much,*" analyses Francesco Galietti, founder of the research centre Policy Sonar in Rome.

The government now has two weeks to organise the presidential election, the first three rounds of which are due to take place on 29th January. In the meantime the leader of the Senate, Pietro Gasso is ensuring the interim.

THE PRESIDENTIAL FUNCTION IN ITALY: POWERS AND VOTING METHODS

In Italy the position of President of the Republic is mainly honorary. The Guarantor of the Constitution and of the country's unity, he has two main powers: he can dissolve Parliament (except in the last quarter of his term in office) and he can reject a bill put forward by the deputies or the senators for two reasons (if he deems that the text is anti-constitutional or if he believes that it is not adequately funded). Carlo Azeglio Ciampi (1999-2006) used this power against a bill on the concentration of the media in 2003 and a second time against a reform of the legal system in 2004. Giorgio Napolitano demonstrated the importance of his role in November 2011, when after Silvio Berlusconi's (1994-1995, 2001-2006 et 2008-2011), resignation he decided not to convene early parliamentary elections and chose to appoint Mario Monti (2011-2013) to the presidency of the Council. Finally he gave a great deal of support to the reforms now ongoing which have been decisive for Italy's future in the European Union.

The President of the Italian Republic is elected by secret ballot for seven years by a college of Grand Electors comprising 630 members of the Chamber of Deputies, 315 senators and 7 life senators, and 58 representatives of the country's 20 regions (3 per region, except for the Aoste Valley which only appoints one) i.e. a total of 1010.

02

In the first three rounds a candidate has to win at least 2/3 of the vote i.e. 674 votes. In the fourth round the simple majority (505 votes) is enough to be elected to the supreme office. Tradition has it that the President of the Republic should be a man of consensus who rallies people beyond the political parties. He usually rallies the votes of most of the Grand Electors to his name. In 2006 however the presidential election was greatly contested and Giorgio Napolitano was elected by the votes of the left-wing Grand Electors only.

The head of State was finally re-elected – a first in the country's history – on 23rd April 2013 – after six rounds of voting and many dramatic turns – after a further crisis in the wake of the parliamentary elections on 24th and 25th February.

WHO ARE THE CANDIDATES?

Just a few days from the Presidential election a few names mentioned have been:

– former President of the European Commission (1999-2004) and former President of the Council (2006-2008) Romano Prodi;

– former President of the Council (1992-1993 and 2000-2001) Giuliano Amato;

– former Mayor of Rome (2001-2008) Walter Veltroni;

– present Finance and Economy Minister Pier Carlo Padoan;

– the governor of the Bank of Italy Ignazio Visco;

– the Minister for Cultural Goods and Activities and Tourism Dario Franceschini;

– Defence Minister Roberta Pinotti;

– the spokesperson of the Democratic Party Anna Finocchiaro;

– Former European Commissioner (1995-1999) and former Foreign Affairs minister (2013-2014) Emma Bonino who has just revealed that she has lung cancer.

According to the poll by Ixé, Emma Bonino and Romano Prodi are the two personalities who have the most support from the Italian population.

The President of the Council Matteo Renzi would like there to be only one candidate running for the suffrage of the Grand Electors. He admitted that finding a successor Giorgio Napolitano will be difficult but said that a candidate would be elected within the four rounds of voting. "*We should reasonably have the name of the President of the Republic by the end of the month,*" he declared.

The Democratic Party has 415 MPs but hopes to be able to count on dozens of allies in Parliament. We should remember in 2013, in spite of the agreement with the left Romano Prodi only won 395 votes in the fourth round of voting i.e. 100 less than the number of Grand Electors on the left.

Both the left and the right are very much divided in Italy at present, just as the Five Stars Movement (M5s) led by Beppe Grill which makes any forecast extremely difficult. Find a personality who will rally the supporters of Matteo Renzi, Silvio Berlusconi and Beppe Grillo seems to be impossible.

Unlike in Greece if no candidate is elected President of the Republic after three rounds of voting Italy will not be forced to organise a snap election. The election will go on until a Head of State is finally appointed. In 1971 Giovanni Leone was appointed after 23 rounds of voting. In 1985 one day was enough for Franceso Cossiga to be elected.

After his resignation from the President of the Republic Giorgio Napolitano returned to being a life senator (which he was from 2005 and 2006). In this capacity he will be taking part in the appointment of his successor. The outgoing head of State who will also now become President of Honour, wants Italy to remain "united and serene in a difficult world."

You can read all of our publications on our site:
www.robert-schuman.eu

Publishing Director: Pascale JOANNIN

THE FONDATION ROBERT SCHUMAN, created in 1991 and acknowledged by State decree in 1992, is the main French research centre on Europe. It develops research on the European Union and its policies and promotes the content of these in France , Europe and abroad. It encourages, enriches and stimulates European debate thanks to its research, publications and the organisation of conferences. The Foundation is presided over by Mr. Jean-Dominique Giuliani.