

Miracle in 100 Days

Maria Rita Latto (August 29, 2008)



The first 100 days of the Italian center-right government, led by Silvio Berlusconi, as seen by the American magazine "Newsweek"



The title is short and sweet: ["Miracle In 100 Days". The subtitle sounds like music to the Italian premier's ears: "How Berlusconi brought order to chaotic Italy, and what comes next."](#) [2]

It is an article written by Jacopo Barigazzi in the 18-25 August issue of "Newsweek" dealing with the current situation in Italy. This article was enthusiastically welcomed by the government and by some media who quoted mainly the title and its first lines, where Barigazzi mentions that "in his first 100 days in office, Silvio Berlusconi may have done the impossible: to a degree unprecedented in modern Italian history, he asserted control over this seemingly ungovernable nation."

But, is it really so? Did this "miracle" really happen that we read about in the foreign press that praises Italy and in particular Mr. Berlusconi, often negatively depicted abroad?

If we read the article carefully, we discover that it is not a complete praise of the Italian premier. While in the media and especially on television, the prevailing idea was that the American magazine thought that Silvio Berlusconi was saving Italy from decline. Indeed, the real "miracle", according to Newsweek, is due to a series of facts creating, in a domino effect, an upswing.

The first miracle is to have taken control of an ungovernable nation reaching an "approval rating of 55 percent—higher than Britain's Gordon Brown, France's Nicolas Sarkozy or Spain's José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero." After this, Mr. Berlusconi "cannily exploited a 2005 electoral law that wiped out these small parties to win a surprise landslide victory from which the opposition is still trying to recover." While the premier "enjoys something of a honeymoon period with the electorate," -continues Barigazzi- "he has also wasted little time in consolidating his authority. One of his first acts: pushing through a bill that gives the top four national officeholders, including the prime minister himself, immunity from prosecution while in office. The bill passed overwhelmingly last month, and put an end to outstanding criminal proceedings against Berlusconi (which he and supporters say were politically driven)." The magazine is referring to the "Lodo Alfano", a law that gives the premier a break from all trials against him for corruption, even though the fact "that this new law was a possible conflict of interest did not go by unnoticed" -comments Barigazzi-, "but Italians are feeling too poor to pay it much attention." These last words cannot be considered as a compliment.

Continuing the article, it appears clear that the peculiarity of the article is that, after the positive start, there is a "crescendo" accompanying the reader to a conclusion that transforms the initial sugar to a bitter taste. In fact, Barigazzi talks about the first laws approved by Mr. Berlusconi's government that do not appear particularly concerned with the Italians' real needs. And, as Newsweek notices, "after 10 years of near-zero economic growth—Bank of America predicts 0.5 percent growth this year—they are demanding security, financial and otherwise." Silvio Berlusconi is trying to succeed in this task "with an iron-fist-in-velvet-glove competence." "Emblematic" -emphasizes Barigazzi- "has been his ability to clean up Naples, buried for months under trash in part because the surrounding communities simply did not trust the government to manage the landfills." Furthermore, with "a similar resolve he tackled the perception that violent crime is on the rise (despite data showing otherwise)" Newsweek continues, remembering the polemics between Italy and the European Union regarding laws against the Rom and troops in some Italian cities. In Barigazzi's opinion, "such tough tactics could give Berlusconi the cover to tackle some of Italy's deeper issues."



The article ends with a sort of warning/prophecy on the premier: "Italians like him now, but what they really want is economic stability. Cleaning up trash and harassing immigrants won't be enough." In fact, with time, Mr. Berlusconi will have to face more challenges, perhaps more difficult to overcome, such as defeating the economic crisis and lowering taxes. At his first misstep, he risks losing his popularity. And Jacopo Barigazzi explains this clearly.

After a deeper and complete reading of the article, the inevitable question remains: is it really in praise of Mr. Berlusconi?

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