

## Berlusconi Video: "I Will Always Be With You"

Judith Harris (September 19, 2013)



His face drawn and pale despite the heavy pancake makeup, Senator Silvio Berlusconi addressed the Italian people in a video message in which he promised, "I will always be with you." The video was released on Wednesday, shortly after a 16-member Senate commission in Rome voted to strip the former Premier of his Senate status on grounds of his conviction in August by the Cassations court, Italy's highest, for tax fraud. At any rate, he declared, "I am absolutely innocent" and, despite the "planned aggression of the judges," it is possible to be a politician even if not in Parliament. Most importantly, however, in the video--which by all accounts was revised again and again before its release--he did not indicate that his "Freedom Party" (Partito della Liberta', PdL) would throw Italy into chaotic instability and new elections by its exit from the government.

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instability and new elections by its exit from the government.

The 16-member commission meeting was just as tense as was Berlusconi, wearing in his video an honestly sober gray suit rather than his customary navy blue. Suggesting the trend, nearly two-thirds voted against Berlusconi, with fourteen members versus just nine in his favor. The next commission meeting will not take place for at least ten days, and will be public. At that time Berlusconi and his lawyers can present their defense. Wednesday's vote, however, was only the first step, and does not take effect until and unless the entire Parliament votes; when that will be is anyone's guess, but it is far enough in the future that elections this autumn seem unlikely.

Predictably, in his video message the former Premier was already on the attack. "I will fight against the sentence," he declared. "You know what happened: a political outsider, a certain Silvio Berlusconi, went down onto the playing field, defeated the joyful war machine of the left and in two months brought the moderates into government.... Even as the prosecutors of Magistratura Democratica [the progressive association of judges] went to war against me. From that time on I was assailed by 50 court cases in which mud was slung at me and my image, making me lose time and waste economic resources."

As for the latest sentence for tax evasion, which was the third level of justice over the past ten years in the case, "I committed no crime, I am not guilty of anything, I am absolutely innocent. After 41 trials without a conviction they delude themselves in thinking they can keep me out of political life. Against a monstrous political decision I will fight in the ways and at the right and oportune time to obtain its revision in Italy and in Europe. They simply invented the crime of my cooking up a fiscal fraud." Under pretexts the judges attacked "my family, my fortune and even my guests" (an oblique reference to his notorious bunga-bunga parties).

In hopes of "achieving socialism via the judicial route," the magistrates, Berlusconi went on to say, have transformed themselves into a counter-power to the state itself. "They want to kick me out through violent aggression. But I am here to ask you to keep your eyes open.... I say to you, react, protest, you have the right and duty to do something to get us out of the situation they have put us in. Every responsible Italian must feel it a duty to engage personally [in this battle]. Announcing the exhuming of his old Forza Nuova party to replace the PdL, he promised: "I will always be with you, stripped of immunity or not.... Go down into the playing field yourselves. Become the missionaries for Forza Italia."

What may interest Premier Enrico Letta the most, given that Berlusconi's still extant PdL is his government partner, was that there was no direct reference in the message to the government. However, Berlusconi did ask for a commitment by the government to respect the PdL demand for a halt to "the fiscal bombardment." This was only a first move. As the noted commentator Ugo Magri of La Stampa daily wrote Thursday, Berlusconi's latest bit of malice consisted in subrosa warnings to both President Giorgio Napolitano and Premier Letta.

Here is Magri's interpretation of Berlusconi's video message: "I will not make the government fall. However, seeing that you have abandoned me to a conviction without raising a finger, I am going to bombard you every day until the political air will not be worth breathing. That is, he will push onto the left the responsibility for the destruction of the political stability that both Europe and the markets demand. "He will place the allies before a crossroad: either undergo, every single day, provocations by Forza Italia or else react, out of exasperation, so that it is you who pulls the trigger that will cause a government crisis."



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