

"Mamma Mia!" A Government with a Difference

Judith Harris (February 22, 2014)



Who, me, Justice Minister? Mamma mia, what an enormous responsibility!" Andrea Orlando, 45, member of Renzi's Partito Democratico PD), said this on learning that he had been tapped for what is--and not only in consideration of former Premier Silvio Berlusconi's travails--one of the toughest slots in the government of Matteo Renzi. To be sworn into office on Monday, the cabinet will be the second smallest in Italian history, with only sixteen ministers. For the first time fully half of Renzi's cabinet ministers are women--and they are young.

ROME - Talk about lapidary remarks: here are three which sum up the creation of Premier Designate Matteo Renzi's cabinet, sworn into office at 11:30 am Saturday.

"This government will last the entire legislature"--Renzi, promising that his new government will endure until the natural end of the legislature in four years time.

" Sorry to disappoint those who relish whispers from behind-the-scenes, but nobody twisted my arm"--President Giorgio Napolitano, on his many hours of consultations with Renzi over, first, the



program and, at the end of this week, the names of the cabinet members.

"Who, me, Justice Minister? Mamma mia, what an enormous responsibility!"--Andrea Orlando, 45, member of Renzi's Partito Democratico (PD), on learning that he had been tapped for what is--and not only in consideration of former Premier Silvio Berlusconi's travails--one of the toughest slots in the cabinet.

This is the second smallest cabinet in Italian history. With only sixteen ministers, its downsizing is surpassed only by the 1947 emergency cabinet headed by Alcide De Gasperi, which brought together the Christian Democrats, Communists and Socialists in common cause. The slimming down of the cabinet should add efficiency, as should the novelty that Renzi has no deputy premier. His Interior Minister Angelino Alfano, who split with Berlusconi over support of the outgoing government headed by Enrico Letta, had been Letta's number two, but has relinquished the post, leaving Renzi more room to maneuver.

Changes in age and gender are also new for Italy and will, it is hoped, breach the paralysis that has been a hallmark of the past few years in Italy (some would say the past two decades). For the first time fully half of Renzi's cabinet ministers are women. Their average age is 45; by comparison, the eight men are older on the average, at 52.

In choosing his partners for what even skeptics hope will be a successful and enduring round of government, Renzi said that he would not install women merely as dress-up. The new Education Minister Stefania Giannini, 53, is a former president of the University of Foreigners at Perugia and comes into the government representing former Premier Mario Monti's Scelta Civica. Maria Lanzetta, 58, was mayor of Monasterace in Reggio Calabria. She has been for some time now in the news for the brutal threats received from the local Mafia, the n'Drangheta. She heads the Regional Affairs Ministry. The youngest among the women is Minister for Reforms Maria Elena Boschi, 33, trained as a lawyer. Second youngest is Marianna Madia, also 33, neo-Minister for Simplification, whatever that will mean. Like Boschi, Madia is a PD faithful.

The elder statesman in the cabinet is the economist Pier Carlo Padoan, 64. A technocrat (rather than a party man) with broad international experience, Padoan has been handed Italy's single hottest political potato, the Finance Ministry. Behind him is a distinguished career as former chief economist for the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OCSE) and, until yesterday, as head of Italy's statistics-gathering agency, ISTAT. He made his first statements as Finance Minister he Saturday, speaking from Australia. "I only met Renzi once," he told an Italian reporter by cell phone.

"Naturally we've been speaking these past few hours. For me the essential is that we not create the usual split between the Finance Ministry and the Premier's office. We have to walk hand in hand." He is credited with promoting a careful balance between growth and austerity, and to this end, lower taxes.

The second key post involving the economy is Labor, whose overseers will be the experienced Giuliano Poletti, 62, president of the leftist Legacoop of Imola and of its financial sidebar, Coopfond. Today he is considered a "technician" in the government but had been an activist in the now defunct Italian Communist Party (PCI). The third of the trio of economic posts is a business woman, Federica Guidi, 45, to take over the Ministry of Development. Guidi is a former president of the youth wing of Confindustria, the Italian national association of manufacturers; her father had been its vice president.



The fourth ministry which involves the economy is the Ministry of Agriculture, to be headed by Maurizio Martina, 36, a PD stalwart considered close to the party's former leader, Pier Luigi Bersani.

There is one more key post worth watching. Graziano Delrio, 54, is particularly close to Renzi and is, like Renzi himself, an admirer of the late Florentine mayor, the leftist Catholic Giorgio La Pira. Delrio is a former mayor of Reggio Emilia and president of the national association of mayors, ANCI. In the Letta government had for a period served as Minister for Regional Affairs. The new Undersecretary to the Premier, Delrio has nine children of his own and will, by all accounts, be a sort of political godfather to Renzi--"his older brother," as one pundit here put it.

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