



Italian centre-right suffers setback but not out in regional polls.

By Paola Del Bigio

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The Northern League defeat in the Emilia Romagna region during the recent Italian regional ballot on January 26th, is a setback for the Italian centre-right coalition who had hoped to force snap elections in case of a victory. Although Mr Salvini and his allies (Mrs Meloni Fratelli d'Italia and Mr Berlusconi's Forza Italia) won the majority of the votes in the Southern Calabria region, the coalition did not make it in one of Italy's wealthiest areas considered a stronghold of Italy's left since the Second World War. Mr Stefano Bonaccini was elected with 51.4% of the vote in Emilia Romagna, while the League candidate, Mrs Lucia Borgonzoni, took 43.6%. The Five Star Movement however was the biggest loser compared to the 2014 elections. It lost more than two thirds of its votes in the region from the time of the party's foundation in 2009.

Voter turnout played a significant role in the left's victory since the 2014 elections and was boosted by a grassroots popular protest movement, "the sardines", who actively campaigned against Mr Salvini's threat "to liberate" the region from the left's dominance and whose contribution turned out to be decisive. Compared to the turnout in 2014 at 37%, the new ballot reached almost 67%. Commenting on the fresh election results Mrs Meloni said " Mr Prodi tells us he is not involved with the newly found "Sardines Movement". "Italians know he always tells the

truth. Like when he promised that we would all be wealthier with the introduction of the euro. That's exactly how it went, hasn't it?"

Despite the fact that the regional elections in the regions of Emilia Romagna and Calabria were meant to be a crucial step in his comeback at a national level, the fulcrum of Italian politics is clearly moving to the right. The centre right coalition has recently won in Calabria, Umbria and notwithstanding the recent result in Emilia Romagna, it has posed a serious unprecedented threat to the left. In the words of Mr Salvini, " for the first time in 70 years, there was a match". "I do not feel defeated", "I will work twice as hard". Mr Salvini's party also significantly increased its votes from 19 to 32 percent compared to the 2014 elections in the left-wing heartland. In terms of the effectiveness of the present government, it is doubtful whether there will be any particular improvement, especially when more responsibility will be taken on by the centre left (PD) after the Five Star Movement's ongoing defeats.