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## **Editorial: Hung parliament in Italy and the difficult gestation of a new government (March–May 2018)**

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During the last Italian general election (4 March 2018), no political party won a clear majority, thus leading to a *hung parliament*. The election outcome has favoured the centre-right alliance, with Matteo Salvini's League (LN) becoming the main Italian political force while the Five Star Movement (M5S) was the most voted political party. Matteo Renzi and the centre-left coalition came third in these elections. The results led immediately to the formation of a new coalition government.

The formation of the new Italian government was a long gestation and it took 88 days in total. During this time a hung parliament occurred, the presidents of the two houses of the Italian Parliament have resigned (Maria Elisabetta Alberti Casellati, Roberto Fico), though Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni remained in his seat to manage state affairs until the formation of a new government. As it is common practice in the Italian political system, the Prime Minister resigned to President Sergio Mattarella who asked him to remain in office until the government formation procedures were concluded.

On 31 May 2018, after 88 days of extremely difficult negotiations, the professor of law Giuseppe Conte became the next Italian Prime Minister with support from LN and M5S, while Matteo Salvini from LN and Luigi Di Maio from M5S were appointed as vice premiers with many competences. These elections though by result avoided the immediate possibility of a new election procedure were characterised by the lack of faith towards the former political establishment and the will of the people to punish its choices and actions.

During March, the negotiations between the elected parties were minimal. The Democratic Party has chosen not to participate in the negotiations to form a government and remained at the opposition, a choice followed by Renzi's resignation (5 March). On 6 March, Matteo Salvini declared that his party would refuse any coalition with the M5S, while later on 14 March, Salvini offered a coalition with the M5S, imposing the condition that League ally Forza Italia (Silvio Berlusconi) should also be included. Di Maio rejected this proposal. Following these events consultations between the Italian President and the political parties took place on 4 and 5 of April, as well as between 11 and 12 of April in order to avoid re-elections. On 18 April 2018 Mattarella asked to President of the Senate, Elisabetta Casellati, to try and reconcile the issues between the centre-right and the M5S, in order to avoid re-elections and assist in the formation of a new coalition government, but she did not succeed in her task.

On 23 April 2018, the Italian President Mattarella provided with an exploratory mandate the President of the Chamber of Deputies, Roberto Fico in order to pursue a political agreement between the M5S and the Democratic Party. Esteemed members of

the Democratic Party, including Matteo Renzi strongly opposed this scenario leading Di Maio called for new elections on 30 April.

On 7 May, President Mattarella held a third round of government formation talks, after which he confirmed the deadlock in government formation negotiations. Following these events he announced his intention to appoint a 'neutral government' (irrespective of M5S and LN's lack of support to take over from Gentiloni and lead the country to new elections. Following these events on 9 May, M5S and LN requested President Mattarella to give them time in order to pull through a government agreement between the two parties. Finally this agreement was reached on 13 May, entitled as 'Contract for the government of change'. On May 18, the final draft of this agreement has been published. The new coalition proposed the appointment of law professor Giuseppe Conte as Prime Minister on 21 of May, who on the 23 of May has received the mandate to form a government by President Mattarella. The mandate leads to a new deal end because the president opposed the appointment of Paolo Savona as Economy Minister due to his support of withdrawing Italy for the eurozone. On 27 of May, Conte gave up the task of forming a coalition government.

Mattarella subsequently called Carlo Cottarelli to the Quirinal Palace on 28 May with the intention of giving him the task of forming a new government. Cottarelli declared his intention to have a vote of confidence by the parliament, pass a budget law for 2019 and then hold ne general elections. On the other hand, without the confidence of parliament, the government would deal only with everyday political affairs and subsequently lead the country toward new elections after August 2018. Cottarelli also guaranteed the neutrality of his government. Cottarelli had the support of the Democratic Party on 28 May 2018. Nevertheless, on 30 May 2018, Di Maio dropped a proposal of impeachment against President Mattarella, and declared his decision to include Paolo Savona in a different government post. Following these events, President Mattarella and Cottarelli agreed on assisting a new political agreement between M5S and the LN. On 31 May 2018 Di Maio, Salvini and the future Prime Minister Conte met in Rome to discuss a new list of government ministers. Later in the afternoon, the formation of a new government was confirmed leading to the resignation of Cottarelli. The Conte Cabinet has sworn on 1 June 2018 and on 5 June 2018, the Conte Cabinet was given the Senate's confidence by receiving 171 votes in favour and 117 votes against, while on 6 June 2018, also received the confidence of the Chamber of Deputies by 350 votes in favour and 236 votes against.