

Europe

Sunset of the Ursula Majority, the bluff is called

POLITICS

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As it was easy to foresee from the results of the European elections of 8 and 9 June last, and as we had widely anticipated on these pages, the outcome of the negotiations for the allocation of the 'top jobs' in the new five-year term of the European Union, and in general the evolution of the political balances within its institutions, appear anything but predictable.

The major exponents of the forces making up the 'Ursula system' - starting with the leaders who had suffered the most humiliating defeats in the two pivotal countries of the Union, Scholz and Macron - hastened, with the ballot boxes still almost open, to affirm that that majority was still standing, and that they would have to proceed with the utmost speed to confirm von der Leyen in the name of continuity, keeping all the right-wing forces out of the agreement and confronting them with a *fait accompli*.

But the attempted forcing soon turned out to be a bluff, the result of weakness alone. For it was evident that while the 'Ursula' majority still existed on paper, its translation into political decisions - first and foremost, the approval of the Commission's nominee in the plenary - would be anything but a foregone conclusion. Firstly because of the internal divisions between its different components, exacerbated by the electoral failure. Secondly, because of the strong differentiation of positions in the Popular group, now more markedly to the right. Lastly, because of the substantial presence of the non-attached group, which could play a decisive role in the votes in the chamber with narrow margins.

In fact, that bluff was very short-lived. At the first meeting of European leaders last week, no agreement was reached on the 'top jobs'. On the contrary, further elements have since emerged to complicate the situation. First of all, relations between the Popular Party and the Socialists have soured: irritated, the latter, by the former's claim, having emerged strengthened as a relative majority group, to increase their weight in institutional offices (in particular, with the request for a 'relay race' between them and the Pse for the post of president of the European Council). Then, the Renew Europe group, after the serious defeat it suffered, showed further signs of collapse, with the exit of the 7 MEPs of the Czech anti-immigration and anti-green deal party Ano, and was overtaken by Ecr, which became the third largest group in Strasbourg, with 83 seats against the 74 of the Liberals. Thinning the already not solid 'Ursula majority', which drops below 400 seats. Finally, on the right there are further attractive and aggregative movements, which could lead to the formation of a third group, in addition to Ecr and Identity and Democracy, with the union between Viktor Orbán's Fidesz, currently still among the non-members, and Ano itself; and of a fourth hinged on the elected

members of Alternative für Deutschland, which could attract Fico's Slovak party, called the 'sovereignists'.

In this delicate situation, the Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni - the only one among the heads of government of the founding countries to have emerged strengthened from the vote, the undisputed leader of the Ecr group and the most authoritative voice of the political world to the right of the EPP - acted calmly and coolly. She went to 'see' the cards of the 'Ursula majority', waiting for the outcome of the debate. And now, faced with the manifestation of the difficulties and doubts that have arisen in that line-up, she registers the growing awareness, first and foremost in the EPP, that either a concrete dialogue with Ecr is opened or the risk of finding oneself in a chaotic and ungovernable situation is just around the corner.

In fact, an official investiture of the candidate for the leadership of the Commission is expected by the end of this week from the meeting of heads of state and government in Brussels. And in the current conditions, the possibility is high that von der Leyen's re-election, with unchanged alignments, will be scuttled by franchi tiratories belonging on the one hand to the Pse and on the other to that substantial part of the Ppe representatives (it is said to be between 10 and 20 per cent) opposed to continuing the "grand coalition" with the socialists and liberals (even worse if it is supported by the group of greens, crippled and feared for their "Gretist" extremism, now disliked by most voters). Imposing, at that point, to start the negotiations all over again from much weaker positions.

In this context, understandably, there are increasing, explicit openings of credit, in the majority, to Meloni herself, who is increasingly considered an essential interlocutor to form an enlarged and solid majority, as well as a possible mediator between the PPE and the right-wing group and (an aspect not to be overlooked) an element of guarantee for the new EU governance with respect to the United States. Both if Joe Biden, with whom the head of the Italian government has established a relationship of trust in recent years, is reconfirmed at the White House in November, and if he is succeeded by Donald Trump, who is politically linked to a 'network' of contacts shared with Meloni, ranging from Orbán to the former Polish prime minister Mateusz Morawiecki to the Argentine president Javier Milei. And who naturally would not like socialist (or worse, green) elements in the Commission placed in foreign policy on pro-Chinese or anti-NATO positions, as has happened in the past.

The negotiations, of course, could take various paths, linked to the distribution of

'top jobs' not only with respect to party and group expectations, but also to national interests (it is always worth remembering that the Commission is, despite everything, an intergovernmental body). And it could materialise in a new von der Leyen mandate, but with a different majority, or instead in the emergence of a new leadership figure embodying the sense of the new balances that have matured at continental level.

What is certain is that an extreme entrenchment of the centre-left 'grand coalition' is becoming less and less likely. That a possible enlargement of the majority to Ecr piloted by Meloni will certainly not be a promissory note on the part of the latter, and will have a significant political price. And that the new Commission and the new Council will necessarily have to profoundly question the approach followed over the last five years on the main dossiers that are the subject of their action. Starting with immigration and ecological/energy reconversion, with its heavy repercussions on industry, agriculture and real estate.