

Beat: Politics

ITALIAN GOVERNMENT PASSES FIRST VOTE ON ELECTION REFORM

LEFT WING REBELS AGAINST APPROVAL

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USPA NEWS - Premier Matteo Renzi's government survived another day after it prevailed Wednesday in the first of a series of confidence votes it called in the Lower House over its election-law reform bill.

But while Renzi expressed satisfaction with the victory, he faced two more confidence votes on Thursday before the entire bill goes to a secret ballot next week. A loss in the confidence votes, held on different articles within the bill, would bring down his executive and government.

That was cited by some dissidents in Renzi's centre-left Democratic Party (PD), who had vocally opposed the bill earlier but ultimately swallowed their concerns and voted in favour.

"Calling a confidence vote was a mistake, but if it doesn't pass the government will fall," said Lower House MP Matteo Mauri.

"It would be irresponsible not to vote". The government won with 352 votes in favour, 207 against and one abstention.

Still, several high-profile PD members including former PD party chief Pier Luigi Bersani, former premier Enrico Letta, and former Lower House whip Roberto Speranza were among 38 PD MPs who did not vote.

After the balloting, Renzi thanked his supporters in the Lower House. "My heartfelt thanks to MPs who voted the first confidence (measure)," Renzi said in a post on his Twitter feed. Reforms Minister Maria Elena Boschi said that the results were promising for the next two confidence votes.

"It's the first step," she said. Opposition MPs staged a sit-in outside the Lower House later to protest the confidence votes.

With banners bearing the slogan 'Renzi, thief of democracy' members of the 5-Star Movement (M5S) and the Left, Ecology, Freedom (Sel) party sat in protest.

Renato Brunetta, House whip for the centre-right Forza Italia (FI) party of ex-premier Silvio Berlusconi, also accused Renzi of destroying democracy and his own party. "Today it's official: the Democratic Party no longer exists," Brunetta told reporters.

He pointed to the number of former PD leaders opposed to the bill adding that Renzi has betrayed them all.

But Renzi, before the vote, had reiterated his warning that the stakes were very high: his coalition executive would collapse if the election reform bill was not approved. Opposition parties called the government "fascist" for its decision to put the bill to confidence votes, which limit debate and pressure coalition party MPs to toe the line or risk bringing down the executive. Renzi dismissed those protests, saying he has behaved in accordance with democratic ideals.

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