

Italy's Prime Minister Mario Draghi resigns as crisis deepens

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Italy's Prime Minister Mario Draghi waves as he leaves after addressing the lower house of parliament ahead of a vote of confidence for the government.

Rome, July 21 (RHC)-- Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi has submitted his resignation to President Sergio Mattarella after key coalition parties withdrew their support for his government. In a statement on Thursday, the president's office said Mattarella had "taken note" of the resignation and asked Draghi's government to remain on in a caretaker capacity.

The resignation opens the way for early elections in September or October. The statement by the president's office did not specify whether Mattarella would dissolve parliament or call snap polls.

Draghi, a former European Central Bank chief, became prime minister in 2021 as Italy wrestled with the coronavirus pandemic and an ailing economy, had reprimanded his squabbling national unity coalition and urged them back into line before it was too late.

He won a confidence vote in the Senate on Wednesday, but boycotts by three of his coalition allies in the voting virtually doomed any prospects for his unity government's survival.

He had already tendered his resignation last week after one of his partners, the populist Five Star Movement, failed to back him in a confidence vote on measures tackling the high cost of living.

Mattarella at the time had rejected the resignation and told him to go before parliament to see if he could keep the broad coalition going until the planned end of the legislature in early 2023.

In a speech to the Senate after surviving the confidence vote, Draghi had made a plea for unity and laid out a series of issues facing Italy and conditions to stay in office.

But Five Star once again decided not to back him, saying he had not addressed their core concerns. Mattarella was due to meet the presidents of the upper and lower chambers of Parliament later on Thursday, his office said. Such consultations usually precede a public statement from Mattarella about his intentions.

Opinion polls have indicated neck-to-neck percentages for the centre-left Democratic Party and the right-wing Brothers of Italy party, which had remained in the opposition to Draghi's coalition.

Democrat leader Enrico Letta was enraged out the outcome, saying Parliament had betrayed Italy and urging Italians to respond at the polls. "Let Italians show at the ballot that they are smarter than their representatives," he tweeted.

The Brothers of Italy has long been allied with the centre-right Forza Italia of ex-Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and the League of Matteo Salvini, suggesting that a centre-right alliance would likely prevail in any election and propel Brothers' leader Giorgia Meloni to become Italy's first female premier.

Meloni, who has been calling for an early election since before the crisis erupted, was triumphant "The will of the people is expressed in one way: by voting. Let's give hope and strength back to Italy," she said.

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