

## WHY ITALY SAID 'NO' TO MATTEO RENZI

Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi's crushing defeat in a constitutional reform referendum cost him his job. What went wrong?

### THE ANTI-RENTI FACTOR

Renzi was nicknamed the "demolition man" when he snatched power in 2014 for his reputation for taking on the establishment, but his popularity slipped in the months leading up to the ballot.

His bullish style came to be seen as arrogance, including by some slighted grandees of his own party, and many Italians accused him of being in league with Brussels, fat cats and the banking sector.

"Renzi is strongly disliked," said Antonio Noto, head of IPR Marketing polling institute, adding that votes against the PM were "votes against the establishment, but also against his style".

Cecilia Carrara, a lawyer in an international firm, said Renzi's "record is disastrous, he has mainly focused on getting good publicity".

The former mayor of Florence also came under fire for failing to get Europe to share the burden of the migrant crisis. Butcher Antonio Canestri told AFP that when it came down to it, "Europe wasn't listening to Renzi".

### ECONOMIC WOES

Renzi was accused of failing to reboot the country's flagging economy -- which has barely grown since 2000 -- or tackle the jobless rate, which has been vacillating between 11.4 percent and 11.7 percent for the last 15 months.

A slight dip in the youth unemployment rate to 36.4 percent -- its lowest rate since October 2012 -- failed to mollify the disaffected.

"Those who voted 'No' were impoverished middle-class families, hit by the economic crisis, without hope of prosperity or well-being for children or grandchildren... (and) the unemployed young," editorialist Maurizio Molinari wrote in La Stampa daily.

Fabrizio Sabelli, professor at the University of Geneva, said "the constitution is not the fundamental problem. It's the improvement of living conditions of so many people who suffer, and this jolt will undoubtedly do us good".

In the areas with the highest jobless rate the "No" camp won with 65.8 percent, while the impoverished south also largely voted "No".

### DEFENDING THE CONSTITUTION

Polls ahead of the ballot showed many voters did not understand the constitutional reform.

Others were worried the proposed changes were dangerous for democracy because they would have removed important checks and balances on executive power.

"Renzi is punished from north to south for his decision to personalise the constitution," wrote the left-leaning Il Fatto Quotidiano.

The 1948 charter, drawn up in the wake of the fascist regime, was "written by selected, enlightened people, not like the politicians we now have and who are not up to the task," said Emanuela Carosi, an egg seller in a Roman market.

Massimo Franco, an editorialist for Corriere della Sera, said: "Labelling this a populist victory against the establishment would be reductive... There is a populist imprint but a mix of factors played their parts, from hostility to Renzi to a desire to defend the constitution".

SOURCE: AFP



## LEFTIST CANDIDATE WINS AUSTRIA PRESIDENCY

Austrian Presidential candidate Alexander Van der Bellen celebrates with supporters at a post-election event in Vienna on Sunday night. Europe's centrist politicians breathed a sigh of relief after Austria's anti-immigration and euro-sceptic Norbert Hofer was defeated in his bid to become the EU's first far-right president.

PHOTO: REUTERS

### CHARTER REFORM REFERENDUM

## Italy PM resigns after clear defeat

AFP, Rome

Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi prepared to hand in his resignation yesterday after suffering a ruinous referendum defeat that has sparked fresh jitters about the fate of a united Europe.

"My experience of government finishes here," said a downcast Renzi after acknowledging a defeat of almost 60-40 percent over his constitutional reform bid, which cast a shadow over the short- and long-term future of the eurozone's third-largest economy.

Renzi, 41, was due to meet President Sergio Mattarella later yesterday to hand in his resignation formally after a final cabinet meeting.

Mattarella will then be charged with brokering the appointment of a new government or, if he is unable to do that, ordering early elections.

The euro briefly sank to a 20-month low and most Asian stocks also retreated as investors fretted over the effect the political instability could have on a long-running banking crisis, and the possibility of an early election that could usher anti-EU parties into power.

Italy's FTSE MIB stock index tumbled 2.0 percent at the opening before clawing back some ground, underperforming other European markets. Italian bond yields also rose slightly, reflecting investor nervousness.

However, traders were reassured in part by the result of Europe's other crucial vote this weekend, which saw Austria reject a populist, far-right candidate for president.



## Raids kill 73 in Idlib

Rebels rule out withdrawal from Aleppo as army advances towards remaining opposition-held territory

AGENCIES

Air strikes killed at least 73 people in rebel-held Idlib province, including 38 in the city of Maarat al-Numan, on Sunday night, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based group monitoring the war, reported.

Russian war planes and Syrian military jets and helicopters have been conducting heavy strikes for months against rebels in Idlib, southwest of Aleppo. Insurgents had previously tried to get help and supplies to fellow rebels in the city from Idlib.

The Observatory said the death toll in Maarat al-Numan included five children and six members of a single family, reports Reuters.

The bombardment included barrel bombs, improvised ordnance made from oil drums filled with explosives and dropped from helicopters, the monitor said. The Syrian military and Russia both deny using barrel bombs, whose use has been criticised by the United Nations.

Meanwhile, Syrian rebels yesterday ruled

out a pullout from east Aleppo despite sweeping government advances, after Moscow announced it would hold talks with Washington on their withdrawal from the city.

The Syrian army has seized two-thirds of east Aleppo and continued to advance yesterday, pounding remaining opposition-held territory.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said earlier that Moscow would hold talks with

Washington this week on a timeframe for the withdrawal of all rebels from Aleppo.

"During the Russian-American consultations, the concrete route and timeframe for the withdrawal of all fighters from eastern Aleppo will be agreed upon," he said, indicating the talks in Geneva would likely start today or tomorrow.

"As soon as these routes and timeframes are agreed on, a ceasefire can come into effect," Lavrov said.

But officials from two rebel groups in Aleppo said they would reject any plan that involved the withdrawal of fighters from the city, reports AFP.

### WAR IN SYRIA



A Syrian boy cries as he stands next to a building hit by an air strike on a village in Idlib. PHOTO: AFP

## UK SC hears govt appeal over Brexit challenge

AFP, London

Britain's Supreme Court began an historic hearing yesterday to decide whether parliament has to approve the government's Brexit negotiations, in a highly-charged case that could delay the country's EU exit.

For the first time ever, all 11 Supreme Court judges convened to hear a challenge by the

government against a ruling that Prime Minister Theresa May must seek lawmakers' approval before starting the process to leave the European Union.

The High Court ruled last month that the government did not have the executive power alone to invoke Article 50 of the EU's Lisbon Treaty, formally starting an exit talks which could take two years.

The decision enraged Brexit supporters and some newspapers who accused judges of thwarting the will of the 52 percent who voted "Leave" in the June 23 referendum.



The vote for Britain to become the first country to leave the 28-nation bloc sent shockwaves across the world and emboldened populists in Europe and the United States.

Supreme Court president David Neuberger said people involved in the case had received threats and abuse and stressed that the judges would rule without any political bias after criticism from Brexit backers.

A parliamentary vote on Article 50 could open the door to pro-EU lawmakers delaying or softening Britain's withdrawal from the bloc.

Neuberger said the judges were "aware of the strong feelings" surrounding Brexit but "those wider political questions are not the subject of this appeal".

"This appeal is concerned with legal issues, and, as judges, our duty is to consider those issues impartially, and to decide the case according to the law. That is what we shall do," he told the court.

## UN appeals for record \$22.2b in global aid

AFP, Geneva

The United Nations yesterday appealed for a record \$22.2 billion (20.9 billion euros) to provide aid in 2017 to surging numbers of people hit by conflicts and disasters around the world.

It's "the highest amount we have ever requested," UN humanitarian aid chief Stephen O'Brien told a press conference.

"This is the reflection of a state of human needs in the world not witnessed since the Second World War," he said. He added that more than 80 percent of the needs stem from manmade conflicts "many of which are now protracted and push up demand for relief year after year."

The global appeal by UN agencies and other humanitarian organisations aims to gather funds to help the 92.8 million most vulnerable of the nearly 129 million people expected to require assistance across 33 countries next year.

The numbers are staggering, especially when considering that three war-ravaged countries -- Syria, Yemen and Afghanistan -- alone account for about a third of all of those in need. The amount appealed for tops the \$20.1 billion requested last December for 2016 -- a year when "humanitarian actors have saved, protected and supported more people than in any previous year since the founding of the United Nations," O'Brien said in the report.

## Barack Obama bids farewell, for now, to art world

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama attended his last Kennedy Center Honors gala Sunday night, making some of his final goodbyes to celebrated artists before leaving office next month.

Ahead of the ceremony, Obama hosted a reception in the White House East Room for this year's award recipients: actor Al Pacino, The Eagles rockers, singer James Taylor, gospel singer and civil rights activist Mavis Staples and Argentine pianist Martha Argerich.

"The Kennedy Center honors are about folks who spent their lives calling on us to think a little to harder and feel a little deeper and express ourselves bravely and maybe take it easy every once in a while," Obama said, calling the gala "one of the parts of the job that I will miss."

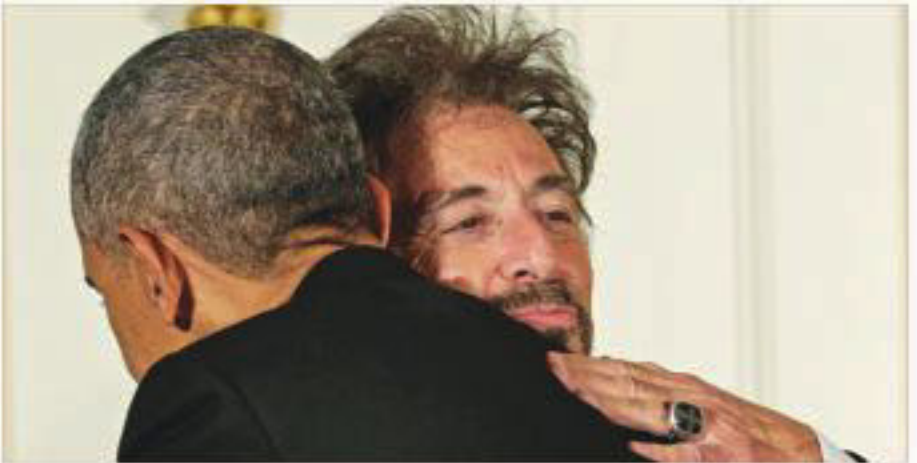
Obama jokingly asked Eagles guitarist

Joe Walsh, a notorious troublemaker, to not trash the White House because he is leaving soon and wants his "security deposit" back.

The Eagles were set to be honored last year but postponed due to the illness of founding member Glenn Frey, who died in January. He received the Kennedy award posthumously.

At a reception hosted by Secretary of State John Kerry on Saturday, Kennedy Center chairman David Rubenstein handed the artists medallions and hung wide rainbow-colored ribbons around their necks.

"In 1968, when James Taylor signed away his rights to Apple Records, I was in Vietnam and America was at war abroad and in turmoil here at home. We were fighting and marching to the music of (Jimi) Hendrix, the drumming of Ringo (Starr), the Doors, the (Rolling) Stones, and the (Grateful) Dead," Kerry said.



## Trial of 'Butcher of Bosnia' nears end

AFP, The Hague

Former Serb military commander Ratko Mladic, once dubbed "The Butcher of Bosnia", returned to a UN court yesterday as his trial for genocide and war crimes in the 1990s conflict nears an end.

More than four years after Mladic's trial opened at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague, prosecutors began three days of closing arguments seeking to dismiss claims he was not responsible for some of the worst bloodshed in Europe since World War II.

Prosecutors say Mladic was in charge and took credit for a plan which "radically altered the demographic picture of the portions of Bosnia claimed by the Bosnian Serbs."

"What happened in municipality after municipality was not an unintended effect of the military campaign, but its very purpose," prosecutor Alan Tieger told the court.

"Ethnic cleansing does not appear to be the consequence of the military campaign, but its goal."

Mladic, 74, has denied 11 charges including two of genocide, as well as war crimes and crimes against humanity for his role in the bloody 1992-95 Bosnian conflict in which more than 100,000 people died and 2.2 million others were left homeless.



## NZ PM John Key in shock resignation

Says he was never a career politician

AFP, Wellington

Popular New Zealand Prime Minister John Key announced his shock resignation yesterday, saying he was never a career politician and it was the right time to go after eight years in the job.

The former Merrill Lynch currency trader called it "the hardest decision I've ever made", with no plans on what to do next other than spend more time with his family.

"Being leader of both the party and the country has been an incredible experience," he told a regular weekly news conference.

"But despite the amazing career I have had in politics, I have never seen myself as a career politician."

Key recently marked his eighth anniversary as prime minister and 10th year as leader of the centre-right National Party, which is set to meet next week to elect his successor.

His deputy Bill English, who led the party to its worst result in the 2002 election, is widely seen as favourite to take over and was endorsed by Key, although he did not immediately confirm he wanted the role.

"Certainly, I wouldn't stand if there wasn't strong caucus support for me standing," he said, adding that since the 2002 flop he had received "a masterclass every day from John Key about how to do politics".

As discussion about Key's decision to walk away swirled around social media, the down-to-earth politician -- once voted the leader most New Zealanders would love to have a beer with -- insisted he was "not the kind of guy that has to hang on to power for power's sake".

## NEWSIN brief

### Trump names Carson as housing secretary

AFP, Washington

US President-elect Donald Trump yesterday chose Ben Carson, the retired neurosurgeon who challenged him for the Republican nomination, to turn around troubled US inner cities as secretary of housing and urban development. Carson, an African American, has no background in housing policy but has cited his poor childhood in Detroit as a qualification for the job.

### French PM to run for president

AFP, Paris

French Prime Minister Manuel Valls yesterday threw his hat in the ring to succeed Francois Hollande in next year's presidential election. Valls said he would step down as premier to campaign for the Socialist nomination in a primary in January. The 54-year-old Spanish-born politician announced his candidacy in a speech from his political base in the tough Paris suburb of Evry.

### Bob Dylan sends speech for Nobel ceremony

AFP, Stockholm

Music icon Bob Dylan won't be at the Nobel prize ceremony this week to accept his award, but he has sent along a speech to be read aloud, the Nobel foundation said yesterday. The 75-year-old, whose lyrics have influenced generations of fans, has had a subdued response to the honour, remaining silent for weeks following the news in October he had won the prize for literature.