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# Italian politics succumbs to 'think-tank mania'

**New institute**

**Italia Futura is another 'advocacy group' aiming to fill a perceived void left by the main parties, says Guy Dinmore**

Italy's shifting political scene is producing what commentators call "think-tank mania", with the latest example today's launch of an institute by Luca Cordero di Montezemolo, entrepreneur and chairman of Fiat and Ferrari.

Following the trend of others with either "Italy" or "future" in their title, the new think-tank goes for both in calling itself Italia Futura. It has triggered inevitable speculation – despite his repeated denials – that Mr Montezemolo, 62, is preparing to enter politics.

Italia Futura's entry comes at a watershed moment. Questions over prime minister Silvio Berlusconi's continued immunity from prosecution come as politicians are focusing increasingly on the shape of politics in a post-Berlusconi era, amid signs that the bipolar party system that emerged from the 2008 elections is disintegrating and heading towards a reconfiguration of the centre.

All serious rivals to Mr Berlusconi, on left and right, have their own think-tanks as badges advertising their ambition. Indeed, Mr Berlusconi, who in 1993 built his Forza Italia party around his Fininvest media empire and ownership of AC Milan football club, is conspicuously alone in not having one.

Mr Montezemolo, with the image of an aristocratic but modernising technocrat who is close to the Church, is among some 20 entrepreneurs funding the new think-tank, including Corrado Passera, head of Intesa Sanpaolo, a large bank.

Andrea Romano, director of Italia Futura and a history lecturer at Rome's Tor Vergata university, has assembled an impressive list of academics and experts. He insists this is not a vehicle for Mr Montezemolo. "This is not a party. It has no political aims," he says in an interview, "... but it has a political meaning."

Mr Romano worked with Policy Network headed by Lord Mandelson, the UK government's business secretary, and Washington's Centre for American Progress, which is close to the Obama administration.

Calling it an "advocacy group", Mr Romano says: "We want to contribute to the political and public debate. Italian politicians are so much involved in everyday emergencies that they cannot focus on five to 10 years' time."

He says think-tanks fill the void left by the main parties, which act more as electoral committees.

Italia Futura's launch will feature a report on social mobility, a crucial issue behind Italy's persistent economic stagnation.

Although his standing has been weakened by personal scandals and criticism by senior clerics, Mr Berlusconi, who turned 73 last month, shows no sign of giving way. But a need for fresh impetus could lead to a cabinet reshuffle, possibly involving Mr Montezemolo.

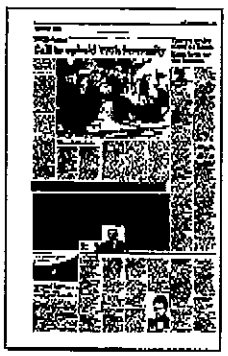
Tensions within the ruling coalition are mirrored by disarray in the centre-left opposition, which is about to choose its fourth leader in less than two years. Pier Luigi Bersani, a former communist, is on track to take over the Democrats but talk of a leftward lurch is exposing the party's fundamental divisions.

Mr Bersani has Nens, a think-tank he co-founded in 2001. But more worrying to Mr Berlusconi, say commentators, are institutes linked to the prime minister's allies.

One such is Farefuturo, launched two years ago by Gianfranco Fini, a possible future prime minister who led his National Alliance party away from its neo-fascist roots into a merger with Mr Berlusconi's Forza Italia to create the centre-right People of Liberty.

Mario Ciampi, Farefuturo director, says think-tanks proliferated because of a "personalisation of politics", with politicians needing outlets for their views within a two-party system that is here to stay.

Farefuturo's causes are those dear to Mr Fini – immigration, national identity, institutional reforms and foreign policy: all issues that have exposed policy splits inside the government.



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