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## Hello EXPO, looking for a KO?

**Thursday, March 27, 2008**

DENNIS REDMONT

Hello EXPO. Lend me your ears.

In fact...lend me your eyes, your mouth, even your wallet!

Milan has moved to Paris this week, totally, to woo the 146 government-steered delegates who will cast their votes for the winner of the World's Fair of 2015, at 5:30 next Monday, March 31.

Izmir, the other contender, is working behind the scenes.

La Scala's musicians have already played at the prestigious Sale Gaveau. Paolo Conte, the magnetic performer, sung Tuesday night under the Louvre's crystal pyramid. Food and Design are zooming up 110 meters to the top of the Arche de La Defense to wine and dine those delegates and others on Friday.

Sunday night the last show: Valentino, Ferrari and other brands -maybe even tenor Andrea Boccelli- are pulling out all the stops at a grand gala at Opera Garnier.

Both the Italian and Turkish political worlds are running big risks.

Will it spell the beginning for the winner, and the end for the loser?

Media tycoon and two-times Prime Minister Silvio



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Berlusconi, who likes to take calculated gambles, for one, is using the EXPO and crumbling flagship Alitalia to split the outgoing Romano Prodi center-left government. That's because he is running for prime minister for a third time in national parliamentary elections on April 13-14, after the two-year-old Prodi coalition of 100 ministers and undersecretaries imploded.

Here is Berlusconi's gambit, according to insiders at his camp: Milan wins the EXPO bid, Berlusconi revives a group of Italian companies to snatch Alitalia from the jaws of Air France and then resuscitates Milan's comatose Malpensa airport, which has just been demoted to a "sub-hub" after 200 flights have been moved to Rome's Fiumicino airport as c 1.

By announcing last Friday at midnight that he was seeking to encourage a last-ditch alliance of companies – instead of Air France – to buy Alitalia, Berlusconi has made this into a national elect issue. And he has split the outgoing government, whose ministers are quarrelling about how muc money the airline still has before it shuts down (reports say it has 100 more days to support itse one million Euro per day loss). And Prodi is also being accused of selling out cheaply to the Fren

But why should EXPO 2015 figure in this?

Because all of a sudden, thousands of businessmen, tradesmen, tourists would come streaming Milan until 2015.

Via Alitalia!

Via Malpensa Airport!

Plus the prospect of 2.7-million-euros worth of government investment and the expectation of 7 jobs.

And Milan's Berlusconi could get another boost for his election fortunes, just two weeks before p day.

But there is a big "IF."

Milan has to win, even by one vote.

Italy and Turkey's governments are desperately counting and recounting the votes. Which will t secret ballot. One may never know what everyone really voted.

No wonder Turkish President Abdullah Gül is traveling abroad.

Look at the latest joiners of the Bureau International des Expositions (cost of joining: Only a fe thousand dollars): Sudan and other African countries.

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No problem. Italy organizes an Alliance for Africa Foundation, headed by the President of Ghana while Jacques Attali, the French guru, helps on the side by promoting microcredit deals for the It

Tibet explodes?

The reaction: Silence on all fronts.

EXPO is too important to antagonize China (winner of 2010 Expo in Shanghai), and many other nations who might follow in its lead.

However Asia, for the moment seems to be fertile ground for Turkey's İzmir, while Italy seems have seduced Latin America (latest conversion: Chile during President Giorgio Napolitano's recent official visit this month). Europe seems like a tossup.

What is a sure bet is that the losing country -Italy or Turkey- will trigger a bitter settling of accounts domestically.

Who lost the EXPO by knock out (K.O.)?

History will then be rewritten.

If Milan loses, Berlusconi will blame it on the Prodi coalition.

And in Turkey, especially these days, will it be: "The Days of Wine and Roses?"

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