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How the Risotto won over the Bulgur

Wednesday, April 2, 2008

Dennis REDMONT

MILAN -- So the Risotto Diplomacy, as they Italians liked to call it, won over the the Bulgur Diplomacy. We will have the Rho Pero tower, a 200 meter tower rising over the smoggy skies of Milan in 2015, with an 80,000 square meter ground floor. And we will have to wait to see indomitable İzmir, the Aegean pearl of the Mediterranean, in the spotlight. We will be talking about food and nutrition, instead of health, the theme that İzmir had proposed.

Even in victory, more than anyone thought (Italians were predicting a difference of 12 votes, but they got 86 vs İzmir's 65 votes), Italy's national election campaign only took a five minute break. While both Letizia Moratti, the steely and elegant mayor of Milan (center right) was celebrating with Massimo D'Alema (former communist, outgoing center-left government) in a display of visible bi-partisanship, that Milanese tycoon and aspiring Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, was sending a zinger to his opponents.

Prodi versus Berlusconi:

"It is a great success. It is a great victory, but it is certainly not due to the merits of (outgoing Premier Romano) Prodi," commented Berlusconi. "Shame on you," answered back Prodi, in the midst of the Paris celebrations. "No it is Prodi who should be ashamed of himself for the damage he inflicted in 20 months in one of the worst governments in Italian history," retorted Berlusconi.

So, very little respite in jubilant Italy for a hard-fought victory. Too much at stake for the national elections of April 13-14 which will give Italy a new government.

Why did Italy win over Turkey? Indeed it was the risotto diplomacy around the world and at home.



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Risotto at home, where Moratti forged a domestic alliance with the political enemies as soon as she got into office in summer 2006, with a long lunch in Milan with Premier Prodi who had just taken office. Prodi was convinced that Milan should be the Italian candidate rather than Turin, Trieste or Naples.

But the real work and Italian dining was done with a worldwide diplomatic effort by Italy, not neglecting any single small country, and using woman power: a key ally was Emma Bonino, the foreign trade minister who had lived for a few years in Cairo, and cashed in many Middle Eastern votes. Thus splitting them off from Turkey.

But also: The head of the provincial government of Milan, Filippo Penati, a former communist, ingratiating himself again with the Cuban government and winning himself an honorary citizenship. The governor of Lombardy, Roberto Formigoni, offering Milanese hospitals for those injured in the Kenyan civilian strife and a special bank to the thousand of Philipppines who work in Milan and send their savings back home. And of course, Moratti herself, recruiting Al Gore as a testimonial to support the Milan candidacy, beside Jacques Attali, the French guru, and even that northern Italian fashion product: Carla Bruni Sark

Three lessons:

What are the lessons learned? First ,count the votes, as always. Secondly, don't work necessarily the big powers--China, Russia and even the United States (which does not vote on the Bureau International des Expositions, thus has only moral suasion). Try the transversal alliances. Think c San Marino vote, and so many other small countries. But enlist some of the more multi ethnic ca for example: Youssou N'Dour, the magnetic Senegalese performer who gave his liltng music to t final Milan presentation in Paris and soccer player Clarence Seedorf, a product of Surinam and Hc and a Milan team player.

Third, never give up and immediately fight back any attacks. When Koreans and Chinese ban mozzarella cheese because of the danger of dioxin, eat mozzarella under the glare of the television lights. When the mainstream media speak about "The mess in Italy" clean upyour city and make investment promises.

Can thesoure three lessons be lost of Turkey?

Thus after 102 years, an Expo, the World's Fair, returns to Milan. Business will flow in, skyscrape towers will rise up. May they not follow the destiny of the tower of Babel. But out the true grit of Italian style and substance that usually wins over the world.

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Dennis Redmont, an executive at the Council for U.S. and Italy, is an American journalist and consultant, who divides his time between Rome and Istanbul. (mediadennis@libero.it)

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