

## **Mediaset chairman defends Berlusconi against 'neo-colonialists'**

By Ben Fenton in London

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Foreign media 'misreads' situation

Silvio Berlusconi's control of Mediaset, Italy's largest commercial broadcaster, is a conflict of interest with his job as the country's prime minister, but foreign commentators misunderstand the situation because of a neo-colonial superiority complex, the company's chairman said.

Fedele **Confalonieri** said non-Italian journalists and intellectuals come into the country with a "Rudyard Kipling" view of its politics, failing to see that it has its own traditions and rules.

He defended the reputation of Mr Berlusconi in an interview with the Financial Times as Mediaset battles through legal actions with Rupert Murdoch's Sky Italia. The 73-year-old has known Mr Berlusconi since they were at the same school in Milan. An accomplished pianist, he accompanied the future leader of Italy when he was a singer on cruise liners.

"In your country, Mr Berlusconi couldn't be prime minister - Rupert Murdoch couldn't - because in your country if you have a [TV] licence from the state, you can't be a politician.

"In my opinion that is too restrictive, but this is the rule. You [in the UK] invented the Magna Carta in 1215. You invented no taxation without representation.

"These are pillars of history. In every country there is that. Conflict of interest is here. If you vote Berlusconi, you vote Berlusconi with his conflict of interest."

Mr **Confalonieri** said overseas commentators consistently misread the situation.

"The attitude of the Anglo-Saxon media generally towards Berlusconi is . . . perhaps too perfunctory.

"Very often, the journalists and the opinion leaders come to Italy and look at it [with] more or less the same attitude of Rudyard Kipling in India: take up the white man's burden.

"[It is as if] you are in a colony and you know there are some things that are not acceptable."

He said that the attitude of visitors was 'we are the white man, and the Italians are a little tanned'.

He noted that a majority in Italy had elected Mr Berlusconi in three elections.

"This is this country with its history, its economy - not an economy of the underdeveloped world - its different customs, different habits, different approach. And Berlusconi is an eminent person."

Dennis Redmont, professor of media at the University of Perugia, said the Italian media had a very different birth to the Anglo-Saxon media.

"In Italy the media and newspapers were born as an instrument of the elite. That's why the debate about its control becomes very ideological."