

# Berlusconi Seeks Talks To Head Off Protests

## Italy Is Worried About G-8 Summit Risks

By Alessandra Stanley  
*New York Times Service*

ROME — Shaken by violent protests at a European Union meeting in Sweden this weekend, Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi of Italy said he wanted to open a dialogue with potential demonstrators at a G-8 summit meeting in Genoa next month.

But in his maiden speech Monday before the Italian Parliament to present the goals of his new government, Mr. Berlusconi took a more defiant tone in announcing a draft law to resolve his conflicts of interest.

"The situation I find myself in was well-known to the 18 million Italians that voted for me," the conservative media tycoon, who owns Italy's three largest television networks, said at the end of an hour-long summary of his government's goals, from cutting taxes to providing subsidies to private schools. He said he would propose a law before the summer recess, but added that "my history as a communications entrepreneur and my personal conscience permit no one to suspect that my institutional goals would be contrary to the common good."

That phrase drew scattered applause and some hissing.

Conflicts of interest, underscored by the fact that as prime minister, Mr. Berlusconi would effectively control state television as well as his own private channels, has been an issue throughout his campaign, but one that Mr. Berlusconi has never recognized as a real problem. The draft law he promised was not expected to require him to sell off his assets.

Mr. Berlusconi has been far more preoccupied by how the next big international meeting will come off when he is its host. More than 100,000 anti-globalization demonstrators are expected to stage a Seattle-like protest in the medieval port city of Genoa.

His speech triggered confidence votes in both houses that were postponed so he could attend the NATO meeting in Brussels with President George W. Bush and the EU meeting in Gothenburg. "We will try to establish a line of communication," Mr. Berlusconi said.

He said he respected the protesters' constitutional right to demonstrate but urged them "not to write off a great opportunity — in large part the objectives of the protesters are also ours."

Debt relief for poor nations is one of the demands of the anti-globalization movement. Mr. Berlusconi told Parliament that Italy was prepared to go be-

yond measures agreed to by the world's richest nations at a previous summit in Cologne in 1999. "We are ready to go beyond Cologne," he said. "Italy will cancel 100 percent of the commercial and bilateral debts of countries which have completed the negotiations."

Mr. Berlusconi, like other leaders, was worried by the fierce clashes between anti-globalization demonstrators and riot police in Gothenburg, which left one youth critically wounded and forced the cancellation of a summit dinner. Concerned that something similar — or worse — could happen when he hosts Mr. Bush and other world leaders at the Group of Eight summit meeting from July 20-22, Mr. Berlusconi called a Saturday meeting with his interior minister to review security measures in the port city.

In another form of summit meeting preparation, Mr. Berlusconi told reporters that any problems in Genoa would be "the responsibility of the preceding governments."

Genoa was selected as the meeting site under the former prime minister, Massimo D'Alema, in 1999. When it came up for a vote in Parliament last year, however, Mr. Berlusconi's center-right opposition also voted in favor of Genoa.

Already, security measures have created special summit meeting zones. Throughout the meeting, all commercial traffic into the city will be blocked. Airline passengers who had booked flights into Genoa on July 20 have already been rerouted to Milan. Last month, the Italian authorities decided to move the foreign ministers meeting July 18 and 19 from the resort town of Portofino to Rome. A separate program for leaders' wives was also canceled because of security concerns.

There is little sign that Mr. Berlusconi's efforts to open a dialogue with protesters is likely to soften their attitude at the summit meeting. "No dialogue, no participation in fake negotiating tables," Luca Casarini, a leader of an Italian anti-globalization organization, said in the newspaper *Il Corriere della Sera* after Italy's new foreign minister, Renato Ruggiero, also made conciliatory efforts. "After Seattle, the point is to block the meetings, not tame them."

Even inside Parliament, there were signs of defiance. Hard-line Italian Communists view the summit meeting as an elitist club that undermines the United Nations general assembly. As Mr. Berlusconi spoke, a few representatives from the Communist Party held up red signs saying "No to the G-8."

