

Italy candidate's anti-graft credentials

by Rachel Sanderson - February 6, 2013

If the centre-left wins the swing region of Lombardy, it will owe a lot to the political neophyte leading its campaign.

Umberto Ambrosoli is emblematic of the resurgent civil movement in Milan, Italy's business capital, that helped to propel Mario Monti and his technocrat government to power in Rome.

Like Mr Monti, Mr Ambrosoli has championed his lack of political experience at a time when support for Italy's political classes is at an all-time low.

"I've been criticised for having no experience in politics. That's fine by me. I want people with me who have no political experience," he says.

Mr Ambrosoli, a criminal lawyer specialising in white collar crime, never intended to run for office in Italy's richest region.

But at the pressing of Giuliano Pisapia, Milan's mayor, another criminal lawyer who beat Silvio Berlusconi's mayoral candidate two years ago, the softly spoken, 41-year old decided to run as an independent. Such was the support he gained in primary elections, he was co-opted by the centre-left as their candidate.

Mr Ambrosoli is trumpeting his anti-corruption credentials - his father Giorgio Ambrosoli was killed by a mafia hitman in the 1970s at the behest of a Sicilian banker who had links to politicians at the time. He is campaigning on a pro-Europe, pro-growth manifesto.

In attempt to separate himself from an ongoing debate about corruption related to party funding, Mr Ambrosoli is funded by donations from "civil society". His website shows a constantly updated list of the names of people - teachers, architects, surgeons and students - who have contributed €180,000 to his campaign.

He is also campaigning on a pledge to take a judicial stand against a growing threat to the local economy from criminal organisations.

In a recent report from Italy's interior ministry put Lombardy together with Piedmont and Liguria showed "a clear presence of criminal organisations". According to that report 16 per cent of the 'Ndrangheta's revenues come from Lombardy and 21 per cent from its northern regional neighbour Piedmont, the highest contributions outside of the criminal group's home region of Calabria.

An annual event commemorating the bravery of Mr Ambrosoli's father was founded four years ago by a group of Milan-based professionals and gained support from Mr Monti, in his capacity as dean of Bocconi University and Mario Draghi, as head of the Bank of Italy and Giorgio Napolitano, president of Italy.

"I'm proud to carry the name of a different kind of person. One of those Italians who remain unmoved by power, by corruption, by wealth," Mr Ambrosoli says. "And I have met many citizens who take the maximum responsibility in the face of difficulty".