

Italy's Berlusconi to face trial on bribery charges



Rome, May 24 (RHC)-- In Italy, three-time former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi will face charges for allegedly bribing witnesses in the notorious "Rubygate" scandal after being ordered to stand trial by a Rome judge.

Berlusconi is accused of paying 157,000 euros over the years to Neapolitan singer Mariano Apicella, who took part in many of the media mogul's infamous "bunga-bunga" parties and is herself on trial for false testimony.

The 81-year-old's court date is part of the "Ruby-ter" investigation, the third involving his parties and alleged underage prostitute Karima El-Mahroug, aka "Ruby the heart-stealer." The original trial, nicknamed "Rubygate" after El-Mahroug's nom de plume, saw Berlusconi beat an original seven-year prison sentence on appeal in 2014, a ruling that was upheld in Italy's highest court in March 2015.

A second trial, named "Ruby-bis," concerns two of Berlusconi's close allies -- former showgirl and Lombardy councillor Nicole Minetti and journalist Emilio Fede -- who allegedly supplied young prostitutes. Earlier this month, Fede was sentenced on appeal to four years and seven months in prison and Minetti two years and 10 months.

The Ruby-ter trial deals with alleged payments made by Berlusconi to people who attended the parties in

exchange for their silence. Prosecutors allege that Berlusconi spent 10 million euros (\$11.8 million) between 2011 and 2015, of which seven million euros went solely to El-Mahroug in the form of cash, gifts, cars, provision of housing, payment of bills and medical expenses.

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