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Berlusconi's ex-dental hygienist quizzed over claims of procuring women for PM

Nicole Minetti questioned over alleged 'bunga bunga parties', as magistrates prepare to request that Berlusconi stand trial

Tom Kington in Rome
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Nicole Minetti, Silvio Berlusconi's former dental hygienist, is suspected by prosecutors of recruiting women to attend Berlusconi's alleged sex parties. Photograph: Alessandro Garofalo/Reuters

Nicole Minetti, the former dental hygienist and TV dancer accused of procuring sex workers for [Silvio Berlusconi](#), has been questioned by magistrates who are preparing to request this week that he stand trial for paying a minor for sex.

As Minetti, 25, was questioned in Milan yesterday, women took to nearby streets to protest against the Italian prime minister's alleged "bunga bunga" parties with starlets and sex workers, ahead of a nationwide demonstration planned for 13 February.

Protesters also jeered Moroccan dancer Karima El-Mahroug as she made an appearance at a Rimini nightclub at the weekend. Berlusconi is alleged to have paid to sleep with Mahroug, known as Ruby the Heart Stealer, when she was 17, as well as pressuring police to free her when she was arrested on suspicion of theft.

Other women who attended parties at his villa near Milan last year and allegedly received cash gifts and free apartments, have complained the scandal has hurt their reputations. "I've been locked at home for a month and a half and have lost a lot of work," said Miriam Loddo, a dancer.

After narrowly surviving a no-confidence vote in December, Berlusconi today offered to work alongside the main opposition party on a plan to boost [Italy's](#) moribund economy - an offer that was firmly rejected last night by the opposition. His position looked less secure as Roberto Maroni, interior minister and member of his powerful ally the Northern League, told the Italian daily Corriere della Sera there was no shortage of candidates to take over the centre right "if Berlusconi decides not to be candidate for prime minister" at a coming election.

Magistrates who quizzed Minetti for two hours at the weekend suspect she recruited women to attend Berlusconi's alleged sex parties and paid their rent and bills as well as participating herself in topless revels.

Showbusiness agent Lele Mora and TV newscaster Emilio Fede, who both attended the parties, are also suspected of aiding and abetting prostitution.

In a recent phone call to an Italian TV show, Berlusconi called Minetti "a splendid person", who was "worth more than many of the so-called ladies on the show".

But wiretaps suggest Minetti was increasingly anxious about Berlusconi's behaviour, claiming "he ... has ruined my life".

In January, she was overheard on the phone telling a friend that Berlusconi had fallen hard for a Montenegrin runaway.

"The more desperate they are, the better for him," she said.

Minetti was appointed a regional councillor in Lombardy by Berlusconi after she treated his teeth when he was hit in the face by man wielding a model of Milan cathedral in 2009. Raised in Rimini, her mother is a British dance instructor married to a UK-born Italian entrepreneur.

