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Democracy and Parties in Italy after the 2013 Legislative Elections

SORINA SOARE, ALEXANDRA IONESCU

*Italy: A Still Faltering Transition*¹

The history of Italy since the end of the Second World War is commonly divided into two parts: a first part, from 1948 to 1993, also known as the First Republic; and a second one, from the 1994 election until today, called the Second Republic. From one Republic to another, not only the political players changed dramatically, but also, and mainly, democracy worked differently². During the first 45 years, Italian democracy was considered to be a case of consensual politics, although a *sui generis* one³, with a highly fragmented and extremely fluid party system marked by the practices of *trasformismo*⁴. However, in a dynamic environment defined by deep political divisions between the Catholics and Communists and the Cold War, the governmental alternatives were limited. As illustrated by Pasquino and Valbruzzi⁵, the absence of democratic alternations nurtured a growing and deeply rooted dissatisfaction with the way the political system worked. Hence, the Italian First Republic perfectly fit the type of polarized pluralism coined by Sartori: high level of party fragmentation, deep ideological polarization, centre-located coalitions with partial turnover and the presence of anti-system parties at the extremes – the Italian Social Movement (MSI) and the Italian Communist Party (PCI)⁶. In these conditions, the regular winner of the elections, the Christian democrats (DC), could dip into a rich pool of smaller parties

¹ See Mark GILBERT, Gianfranco PASQUINO, "Introduction: The Faltering Transition", in Mark GILBERT, Gianfranco PASQUINO (eds.), *The Faltering Transition*, Berghahn, Oxford, 1999, pp. 21-32.

² Sergio FABBRINI, "The Transformation of the Italian Democracy", *Bulletin of Italian Politics*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2009, pp. 29-47.

³ Indeed, the Italian First Republic lacked cultural segmentation, while it was characterized by strong ideological polarisation and adversarial forms of cooperation, the parties being in a privileged position of mediation not only between the state and society but also between the branches of the Parliament and Government. Matthijs BOGAARDS, "The Italian First Republic: 'Degenerated Consociationalism' in a Polarised Party System", *West European Politics*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2005, pp. 503-520. Simona COLARIZI, *Storia politica della Repubblica, 1943-2006*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2007 quoted by Sergio FABBRINI, "The Transformation...cit.", p. 33. See also Giovanni SARTORI, *Parties and Party Systems. A Framework for Analysis*, ECPR Press, Colchester, 2005.

⁴ That is the tendency for the MPs to voluntarily ignore their political identities and switch from out to in office. For an up-to-date description of this longstanding phenomenon, see: Marco VALBRUZZI, "Is *trasformismo* a Useful Category for Analysing Modern Italian Politics?", *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2014, pp. 168-184.

⁵ Gianfranco PASQUINO, Marco VALBRUZZI, "Still an Outlier: Italy in a Southern European Comparative Perspective", *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2010, pp. 183-199.

⁶ Giovanni SARTORI, *Parties and Party Systems...cit.*, pp. 117-124.

either from the left or the right spectrum in order to build a governmental coalition, whereas the PCI, the largest Communist Party in the west, was from the start excluded despite its significant electoral scores (around 1/3 of the votes).

Considering this polycentric system of government¹ and the consequent diffusion of party patronage and clientelism, scholars like Calise have argued that the Italian First Republic could not be included in the conventional category of a parliamentary system, preferring instead the category of *particracy*, where party elites controlled and filtered both processes of political selection and policy making². In brief, without a real stake in terms of alternation in government, the Italian political system was "dominated by the parties rather than governed by them" in the sense that they could deeply influence simultaneously Italian politics, economy and society³.

Foreseen for over a decade, the demise of the First Republic was accelerated by the disclosure of the endemic political corruption as a result of the famous judicial investigation called *Mani pulite* (Clean Hands). In a couple of years the old party system collapsed and new political players held the stage. In 1993, following a national referendum organized in April, a new electoral law (276&277/1993) came into force. Meant to enhance governmental stability, the law set up a mixed electoral system with significant differences between the Chamber and the Senate: 75% of the parliamentary seats were allocated on a first-past-the-post basis and the remaining 25% through proportional representation⁴. One of the main consequences of the law was the increased strategic importance of pre-electoral alliances, a major asset in a bipolar political competition. However, despite its majoritarian dimension, the fragmentation of the party system endured, transforming the task of building governmental coalitions into real exploits (e.g. no less than 11 partners in the second Prodi Government). In the meantime, the institutional infrastructure remained unchanged, as well as the weight of patronage and clientelism⁵. Still, compared to the First Republic, several breakpoints ranging from clearer governmental alternatives to increased duration of cabinets were noticeable.

In 2005, the centre-right majority of that time once again revised the electoral system. But on the whole the fragmentation of the party system was reinforced⁶ and, as illustrated by Fabbrini, "the aggregate electoral weight of the two main parties was almost cut in half as compared with the aggregate weight of the two main parties in the First Republic. Whereas in 1976 the DC and the PCI together polled 73.1 per cent of

¹ Gianfranco PASQUINO, *Il sistema politico italiano. Autorità, istituzioni, società*, Bononia University Press, Bologna, 2006.

² Mauro CALISE, "The Italian Particracy: Beyond President and Parliament", *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 109, no. 3, 1994, pp. 441-460.

³ Sergio FABBRINI, "The Transformation...cit.", p. 33.

⁴ For more details: Gianfranco PASQUINO, "La riforma elettorale in Italia: fatte le leggi si cerca il rimedio", in Oreste MASSARI, Gianfranco PASQUINO (eds.), *Rappresentare e governare*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1994, pp. 221-238; Roberto D'ALIMONTE, Alessandro CHIARAMONTE, "Gli effetti distorsivi del nuovo sistema elettorale", in Stefano BARTOLINI, Roberto D'ALIMONTE (eds.), *Maggioritario ma non troppo. Le elezioni politiche del 1994*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1995, pp. 373-400.

⁵ Fabrizio Di MASCIÒ, *Partiti e Stato in Italia. Le nomine pubbliche tra clientelismo e spoils system*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2012.

⁶ Alessandro CHIARAMONTE, "Il nuovo sistema partitico italiano tra bipolarismo e frammentazione", in Roberto D'ALIMONTE, Alessandro CHIARAMONTE (eds.), *Proporzionale ma non solo. Le elezioni politiche del 2006*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2007, pp. 369-406

the vote, in 2006 the two main parties – *Forza Italia* and the Left Democrats (*Democratici di Sinistra*, DS) – together polled 40.8 per cent¹. However, in the subsequent elections, bipolarism was enhanced as a result of the institutionalization of two major parties, one on each side of the political spectrum, the Democratic Party (PD), on the left, and the People of Freedom (Pdl) on the right.

In brief, one can say that, for two decades, the political system assembled on the ruins of the First Republic evolved towards a more competitive democracy, with an alternation between centre-left and centre-right alliances and recurring conflicts among their various respective members². Indeed, after 1994, not only the players of the Italian party system changed – as a result of the birth of *Lega Nord* (LN) and *Forza Italia* (FI) – but the whole political mechanics, as Italian politics moved from constrained coalitions to alternating centre-right and centre-right “blocs”³. Within this framework, Silvio Berlusconi became not only a prominent political figure, but also the standard of the political competition. Although Italians were accustomed to leader pre-eminence in the political arena, the last example being the sparkling personality of the Socialist Bettino Craxi, with Berlusconi’s entrance into politics, a new party model was coined, the personal party, a media-based political enterprise serving as an organizational weapon for its charismatic leader⁴.

Moreover, the rise of various parties claiming to speak on behalf of different regional identities and, especially, the rise of the LN, activated a new conflict between the centre and the periphery⁵. Since the 1980s, the LN has built its distinctiveness on two pillars: on the one hand, on the creation of a so-called *Padana* identity of the industrious North; on the other, on a patchwork of disparate elements, from the vilification of immigration to the denunciation of the Southern Italian way of doing politics and managing public resources⁶. Ever since the 2008 election, LN has regularly increased its political power, measured in seats, both at a national and sub-national level and, significantly, extended its territorial influence to the central regions, once traditional feuds of the left.

On the eve of the 2013 elections, “unravelling the knots of Italian politics was as elusive a task as ever”⁷: the same faces behind different party names, the same rhetoric deprived of concrete political support and, most of all, a pervasive anti-establishment discourse, a broad distrust in parties and, most of all, political disaffection. Hence,

¹ Sergio FABBRINI, “The Transformation...cit.”, p. 37.

² *Ibidem*, p. 33.

³ Luca VERZICHELLI, “Still a Central Institution? New Patterns of Parliamentary Democracy in Italy. 1992- 2002”, Paper CIRCaP, Università di Siena, 2004, p. 2, available at: <http://www.sociol.unimi.it/ricerca/parlamento/papers/verzicelli1.pdf>, last accessed: 20 December 2013.

⁴ Mauro CALISE, *Il Partito personale. I due corpi del leader*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2010 [2001]. See on the same topic Marco TARCHI, *L’Italia populista. Dal qualunquismo ai girotondi*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2003 and Paul GINSBORG, *Silvio Berlusconi: Television, Power and Patrimony*, Verso, London, 2005.

⁵ Giorgia BULLI, Filippo TRONCONI, “Regionalism, Right-Wing Extremism, Populism: The Elusive Nature of the Lega Nord”, in Andrea MAMMONE, Emmanuel GODIN, Brian JENKINS (eds), *Mapping the Far Right in Contemporary Europe. Local, National, Comparative, Transnational*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2012, pp. 78-92.

⁶ Marco TARCHI, “The Lega Nord”, in Lieven De WINTER, Huri TÜRSAN, *Regionalist Parties in Western Europe*, Routledge, London, 1998, pp. 143-157.

⁷ Mark GILBERT, Gianfranco PASQUINO, “Introduction...cit.”, p. 21.

it looked as if Italy's Second Republic was somehow *lost in transition*¹. As observed by Briquet, "the historical cycle which Italy underwent in the last decade of the 20th century consisted above all of a brutal process of replacement of political elites, far more than it was the product of an abortive attempt to restore transparency and morality at the heart of politics"². The gist of the Second Republic's history is hence summarised by Bull and Newell as an unsolved debate over fundamental institutional (including electoral) reform that has become entangled in day-to-day politics without an agreement over what has to be changed³. Moreover, the overlapping between the contentious character of institutional reforms and the personalisation of political power⁴ led to the political crisis opened by the third mandate of Silvio Berlusconi and, eventually, to the epilogue of the 2013 general elections. In this context, a relevant major explanatory variable is provided by the ever-growing disenchantment of Italian citizens.

The 2013 Elections: General Overview

The roots of the February 2013 elections are to be found in a vicious circle connecting political instability and the crisis of the public debt at the end of 2011. In between, the mutually reinforcing bond of law and democracy was strongly called into questions in a climate of harsh polarization; reciprocal allegations of oligarchic and even authoritarian deviances came along. More specifically, the low level of trust in both politics and justice, along with the mistrust in the capacities of the Italian economy, fed a climate of anti-politics, a perfect breeding ground for "purifying" and messianic populist discourses arguing forcefully for "a redemption" of Italian democracy so that it would better conform with a narrow definition of democracy: the power of the (genuine) people. In brief, regularly portrayed as the source of all evil, politics (political parties and politicians, but also the judiciary and the public administration) became tantamount to a rotten arena looking for immediate salvation solutions or leaders.

Chronologically speaking, the origins of the 2013 general elections can be tracked down to the autumn 2011 debt crisis in Europe and the resignation of Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. Facing a dramatic financial challenge intensified by the spectre of political instability, the appointment of Mario Monti as Prime Minister in November 2011 nurtured great expectations regarding the containment of the debt crisis and the recovery of the Italian economy, as well as the guarantee of a legitimate and correct functioning of the democratic institutions, procedures and mechanisms.

¹ Sergio MARTINI, Mario QUARANTA, "An Unresponsive Democracy? Explaining the Dynamics of Italian Political Discontent: 1973-2012", *Paper SISP 2013*, p. 15, available at: <http://www.sisp.it/files/papers/2013/sergio-martini-e-mario-quaranta-1548.pdf>, last accessed: 25 January 2014.

² Jean-Louis BRIQUET, *Mafia, justice et politique en Italie: L'affaire Andreotti dans la crise de la République (1992-2004)*, Karthala, Paris, 2007, p. 335 quoted by Phil EDWARDS, "Alternation? What Alternation? The Second Republic and the Challenge of Democratic Consolidation", *Bulletin of Italian Politics*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2011, p. 321.

³ Martin J. BULL, James L. NEWELL, "Still the Anomalous Democracy? Politics and Institutions in Italy", *Government and Opposition*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2009, pp. 42-67.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

So Mario Monti, an ex-EU commissioner and a recently appointed Senator for life, was portrayed as the last minute Saviour with a particularly well-furnished agenda. Backed up by President Giorgio Napolitano and the major political players, with the notable exception of LN, Monti's cabinet was supposed to repair Italy's economic stability and its international/EU credibility, to implement austerity measures and, last but not least, to restore both the accountability and reliability of the elected Italian politicians.

By the end of 2012, the high social costs of the austerity measures together with the politicization of the reforms caused a cabinet deadlock. On the occasion of the parliamentary vote on the budget, Berlusconi's PdL withdrew its support for Monti, who subsequently handed his resignation to President Napolitano. Maintained at the head of the interim government, Monti guided Italy during the period of political uncertainty leading from the announcement of a snap election to the surprising results of the general elections of February 24-25, 2013.

The new Parliament was to be elected under the so-called Porcellum electoral formula that replaced the previous 1993-2005 electoral system¹. This formula², with its distinctive electoral premium, was designed to guarantee stable governments, seeing that from 2006 on the main Italian parties rarely managed to secure a majority in both Chambers. Hence, with a relatively low electoral result, a minority per se can easily be transformed into a majority. Moreover, according to the amendments of the electoral system (Law 270/2005), in order to get seats in the Chamber, coalitions have to reach a minimum of 10% of the votes, single parties 10% and 2% for every party in a coalition, while to get into the Senate, a coalition needs a minimum of 20% votes, a single party 8% and every party in a coalition 3%³. Still, the electoral premium could not entirely balance the effects of the redundant Italian bicameralism, according to which a government has to have the majority in both Chambers, thus providing numerous blackmail opportunities for a myriad of small and medium parties, with negative consequences for the overall stability of the executive⁴.

Thus, the story was supposed to be the same or at least similar to the previous elections: a competition between the two major competitors, PdL and PD, along with their traditional allies, respectively LN and small left-wing parties. In other words, the landscape was seriously disturbed not so much by the involvement of the former Prime Minister, Mario Monti and his Civil List, but mostly by an atypical newcomer,

¹ For more details see Roberto D'ALIMONTE, Alessandro CHIARAMONTE (eds.), *Proporzionale ma non solo...cit.*

² The electoral law was named by its own creator, Roberto Maroni (LN), a pig dinner, successively named by Sartori as Porcellum. At the end of 2013, a ruling by Italy's constitutional court declared the electoral law unconstitutional on the basis that it fails to provide the basic right to express a preference on who should represent the citizens. The unconstitutionality especially concerns the mechanism included in the Porcellum that guarantees the electoral premium to the coalition that wins the highest percentage of votes at the Chamber, even if it fails to win an absolute majority.

³ A detailed and updated analysis can be found in Alessandro CHIARAMONTE, Nicola MAGGINI, "The 2013 Election Results. Protest Voting and Political Stalemate", in this special issue.

⁴ Although changing the electoral law has been a priority for several years, it was not part of any serious political agenda until it was surprisingly declared unconstitutional in November 2013.

Beppe Grillo and his 5 Stars Movement. Unsurprisingly, the competition was marked by criticism addressed to the austerity policy and the correlated social costs. The politicization of justice for some and the corruption of the establishment for others were major elements of debate. Moreover, the European Union became a part of the debate: whereas the PPE expressed its open support for Mario Monti's List, other competitors (e.g. LN and M5S) diffused euro-sceptical messages¹.

Thus, the 2013 elections took place in a context of instability, with the spectre of Greece's collapse haunting the debates. The results caused havoc. The Second Republic's two main parties, PD and PdL, lost respectively 30% and about half of their 2008 electorate². Showing a similar negative trend, LN lost more than half of the 2008 votes, with a significant contraction in the "red" central areas. Mario Monti's list lost the electoral wager with less than 2 million votes, concentrated for the most part in north-western Italy. Acting previously at the sub-national political level, Beppe Grillo's 5 Stars Movement (M5S) now impressed scholars, journalists and politicians with the geographically homogeneous consensus it was able to generate at a national scale: the complex populist discourse preached by Beppe Grillo generated an electoral tsunami tantamount to a stunning national election performance of 26% of the votes³.

Beyond the bewilderment caused by the 2013 elections, the Italian case prompts several major questions: What kind of democracy is Italy a case of? Does current Italian party politics belong to a specific type of party system? And what sort of parties are we dealing with? How can we understand and explain the effects of the electoral system and the reactions of Italian voters? What prospects are there for Italian politics in the years to come?

The articles of this special issue are all giving answers, solid or only tentative, to all these questions. By doing so, they not only put the Italian case to the test of political science. They put the heuristic resources of political science to the test of the Italian case. We believe the endeavour to be successful.

¹ On the relevance of the EU issue during the electoral campaign see Renaud DEHOUSSE, "Europe at the Polls. Lessons from the 2013 Italian Elections", *Notre Europe*. Policy paper 92, 2013, available at: <http://www.notre-europe.eu/media/italianelections-dehousse-ne-jdi-may13.pdf?pdf=ok>, last accessed: 26 January 2014.

² "Chi ha vinto, chi ha perso, e dove", *Elezioni Politiche 24-25 Febbraio 2013. Analisi dell'Istituto Carlo Cattaneo*, available at: www.cattaneo.org/images/comunicati_stampa/Analisi%20Istituto%20Cattaneo%20-%20Elezioni%20politiche%202013%20-%20Voti%20assoluti%2026.02.13%20def.pdf, last accessed: 24 January 2014.

³ Cecilia BIANCALANA, "Il populismo tra malessere democratico ed esigenza partecipativa: il caso di Beppe Grillo e del Movimento 5 Stelle", *Trasgressioni*, XXVIII, issues 1-2, 2013, pp. 3-128.

Party Names and Abbreviations

- AN (since 1994): *Alleanza Nazionale*, National Alliance.
- CCD (1994-2002): *Centro Cristiano Democratico*, Christian Democratic Centre.
- CDU (1995-2002): *Cristiani Democratici Uniti*, United Christian Democrats.
- CI (since 1998): *Partito dei Comunisti Italiani*, Party of Italian Communists.
- DC (1946-1994): *Democrazia Cristiana*, Christian Democracy.
- DEM (1999-2002): *I Democratici*, The Democrats.
- FdL (since 2013): *Fratelli d'Italia*, Brothers of Italy.
- FI (since 1994): *Forza Italia*, Go Italy.
- FT (since 1994): *Fiamma Tricolore*, Tricolour Flame.
- IDV (since 1998): *Italia dei Valori*, Italy of Values.
- LN (since 1992): *Lega Nord*, Northern League.
- MARGH (2002-2007): *La Margherita*, The Daisy.
- M5S (since 2013): *Movimento 5 Stelle*, Five Stars Movement.
- MPA (since 2005): *Movimento per le Autonomie*, Movement for Autonomies.
- MSI (1948-1994): *Movimento Sociale Italiano*, Italian Social Movement.
- PCI (1946-1992): *Partito Comunista Italiano*, Italian Communist Party.
- PdL (2008-2013): *Popolo della Libertà*, People of Freedom.
- PDS (1992-1998): *Partito democratico della Sinistra*, Democratic Party of the Left.
- PLI (1946-1994): *Partito Liberale Italiano*, Italian Liberal Party.
- PPI (1994-2002): *Partito Popolare Italiano*, Italian Popular Party.
- PRI (1946-1994): *Partito Repubblicano Italiano*, Italian Republican Party.
- PSDI (1948-1994): *Partito Socialista Democratico Italiano*, Italian Social Democratic Party.
- PSI (1946-1994): *Partito Socialista Italiano*, Italian Socialist Party.
- PSIUP (1968-1972): *Partito Socialista di Unità Proletaria*, Socialist Party for Proletarian Unity.
- PSU (1966-1969): *Partito Socialista Unito*, Unified Socialist Party.
- RAD (since 1956): *Partito Radicale*, Radical Party.
- RC (since 1991): *Partito della Rifondazione Comunista*, Communist Refoundation Party.
- SA (2008-2009): *La Sinistra Arcobaleno*, The Left-Rainbow.
- SEL (since 2009): *Sinistra ecologia e libertà*, Left, Ecology and Freedom.
- SC (since 2013): *Scelta Civica*, Civic Choice.
- UDC (since 2002): *Unione dei Democratici Cristiani e di Centro*, Union of Christian and Centre Democrats.
- UDEUR (1999-2012): *Unione Democratici per l'Europa*, Union of the Democrats for the Europe.
- VERDI (since 1987): *Verdi*, Greens.

Democracy at Stake

GIANFRANCO PASQUINO

Extremely rare have been the moments since 1946 when democracy was truly at stake during the transformation of the Italian Republic. Making reference to the contemporary debate on democracy, there never was a crisis *of* democracy in the Italian case, that is, a rejection, either by the elites or by the citizens, of the democratic framework as inadequate. Nevertheless, there have been several challenges against Italian democracy, as well as several crises *within* its framework, that is, several problems regarding the functioning of the democratic regime. Widely accepted and legitimated by a Constitution that, to the (self)exclusion only of the neo-Fascists, had been drafted and approved by all parties, Communists included, the democratic Republic has produced prosperity while, at the same time, shaping a politically competitive environment. However, for reasons having to do both with the Cold War, and with their inability to muster enough votes, the Communists never participated in the various national governmental coalitions. Hence, the Italian political system was deprived of those important requisites called governmental alternation and circulation of elites. While the Communists were in the government at the local level in quite a number of important cities and provinces, they were barred from governmental power at the national level from 1947 up to the end of what I will precisely call the "first phase" of the Italian Republic, that is, 1992¹. At that time, however, the Communist Party no longer existed.

The Way Italian Democracy Was

In a way, the Christian Democrats provided a significant amount of *political* stability, but their highly factionalized party was also the engine of *governmental* instability. Most foreign observers and scholars were confounded by what they thought were signals of deep democratic weakness. On the contrary, governmental crises and frequent ministerial reshufflings were mechanisms used to reallocate political power among and within the parties (and the factions²) and to resynchronize the governments with a changing socio-economic system. Governmental instability, the hallmark of this long phase of the Italian Republic, was counteracted by two even more significant phenomena: the long tenure of some prominent heads of government and important ministers and the overall stability of the governmental coalitions. So far there have been fifty-nine governments, but only twenty-six heads of government, some of them leading several governments: Alcide De Gasperi 8, Giulio Andreotti 7, Amintore Fanfani 6, Aldo Moro 5, Mariano Rumor 5, Silvio Berlusconi 4. There were

¹ See Luca VERZICHELLI, Maurizio COTTA, "From 'Constrained' Coalitions to Alternating Governments?", in Wolfgang C. MÜLLER, Kaare STRØM (eds.), *Coalition Governments in Western Europe*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000, pp. 433-497, the best analysis of the entire period.

² Carol MERSHON, *The Costs of Coalition*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2002.

three major governmental coalitions: the centrist – *Democrazia Cristiana* (DC), *Partito Socialista Democratico Italiano* (PSDI), *Partito Repubblicano Italiano* (PRI), *Partito Liberale Italiano* (PLI) – from 1948 to 1960; the center-left – DC, PSDI, PRI, *Partito Socialista Italiano* (PSI) – from 1962 to 1976; and the *pentapartito* – DC, PSI, PSDI, PRI, PLI – from 1980 to 1992. At the height of the struggle against terrorism and in the midst of the first major economic crisis, an “incomplete” Grand Coalition also appeared, better defined National Solidarity (1976-1978), in which the Communists supported an all-Christian Democratic government in exchange for chairing some important parliamentary Committees. On the whole, there was a significant continuity of public policies, usually a mixture of State intervention and market competition. It was never a matter just of *survival*, as too many authors have been fond of emphasizing¹, but of skillful adaptation, moderate change and the capability to withstand what amounted to a serious attack by terrorists, left and right (including a coup in the making in 1964), against the Italian State. Not a single time was the electoral process disrupted nor were the rights of the citizens seriously curtailed.

All this is meant to stress that the interpretations provided by too many scholars emphasizing the inexistence of a government, as if nobody were in charge of politics at the top, considered as the paramount Italian problem, were considerably exaggerated, largely wrong. Those interpretations were also conveying some misleading suggestions concerning the ways to improve the functioning of the Italian political system and to sustain its needed transformation. In one of the most interesting books² devoted to the overall functioning of the Italian political system, Joseph LaPalombara, reflecting in a subtle ironical way on the politics of Italy few years before the collapse, made two major points. First, in the light of its many inherited shortcomings, having long roots in the past, Italian democracy was functioning at its best. In any case, it was highly unlikely that the Italians (the political class) could fabricate anything better. Second, one should refrain from interfering with the existing institutional mechanisms. Change may easily produce a worse situation. Though they are intelligently and lucidly presented and argued, I disagree with both statements. However, there was more than a kernel of truth in what LaPalombara held. No doubt post-1994 Italian democracy has definitely not been or performed better than the previous phase. The reforms of the electoral law and the tinkering with the Constitution have, from a purely institutional perspective, worsened the functioning of the system and have also increased the dissatisfaction of the voters. Moreover, the overall situation is not settled and the political system as a whole is still undergoing a never-ending transition³.

¹ Percy A. ALLUM, *Italy-Republic without Government?*, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1973; Giuseppe DI PALMA, *Surviving without Governing. The Italian Parties in Parliament*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1977; Sabino CASSESE, “Is There a Government in Italy? Politics and Administration at the Top”, in Richard ROSE, Ezra N. SULEIMAN (eds.), *Presidents and Prime Ministers*, American Enterprise Institute, Washington, DC, 1980, pp. 171-202.

² Joseph LaPALOMBARA, *Democracy, Italian Style*, Yale University Press, New Haven-London, 1987.

³ Martin BULL, Gianfranco PASQUINO, “A Long Quest in Vain: Institutional Reforms in Italy”, *West European Politics*, vol. 30, no. 4, September 2007, pp. 670-691.

Autobiography of the Nation, Regime and the Idea(l) of a Normal Country

A relatively new generation of scholars has curiously offered a more positive interpretation of the Italian political system. According to Newell¹, the politics of Italy is the politics of a "normal" country. On his part, Bull² has peremptorily declared that the "transition", whatever is meant by this term, is over. Though troubled by their own mixed-feelings and both bashing Berlusconi, the British historian Paul Ginsborg³ and the former editor of the *Economist* Bill Emmott⁴ have strived to find, respectively, several small Italian virtues, and something good, if not in the politics of Italy, at least in its socio-economic system. Without hesitation, I strongly object to all these interpretations. I will shape my analysis around the most important components of the post-1994 political system⁵. At the heart of my analysis, I will always keep the question: "Has Italian democracy been at stake in the past twenty years?"

In his own words, Berlusconi took the field of Italian politics in 1994 in order to prevent the widely predicted victory of the Communists, former Communists, and post-Communists. Millions of center-right voters, painfully in search of the political and parliamentary representation that the crumbled *pentapartito* could no longer grant to them, immediately rewarded Berlusconi's political audacity and gamble. Berlusconi may be "unfit to lead Italy", as the *Economist* famously wrote in its front page in 2006, but he has largely dominated Italian politics since. Mindful of Fascism, some scholars and journalists⁶ have resuscitated two famous interpretive keys: autobiography and regime. The antifascists grouped around the political movement called "Giustizia e Libertà", following Piero Gobetti (1901-1926) claimed that Fascism was the autobiography of the Italian nation. All the unsolved problems of the unification had come home to roost and Mussolini proved to be capable of building upon them in its attempt to found a regime. Berlusconi's opponents, many of them, in a way, the ideological successors of "Giustizia e Libertà", so much so that they called their own movement "Libertà e Giustizia", have argued that, indeed, Berlusconi is the autobiography of Italy and its post-1946 inadequacies and unsolved problems. They have also accused Berlusconi of having attempted to construct a regime. In their opinion, Berlusconi may have not succeeded but his political actions and his television stations have inexorably affected and fatefully distorted Italian democracy.

By "regime", Italians refer exactly to the period of Fascist rule (1922-1943), characterized by unfettered political power in Mussolini's hands utilized with little restraint to silence and sanction any and all opposition. For purely polemical purposes, the long, though not solitary and definitely not authoritarian, rule by the Christian

¹ James L. NEWELL, *The Politics of Italy. Governance in a Normal Country*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010.

² Martin BULL, "The Italian Transition that Never Was", *Modern Italy*, vol. 17, no. 1, February 2012, pp. 103-118.

³ Paul GINSBORG, *Salviamo l'Italia*, Einaudi, Torino, 2010.

⁴ Bill EMMOTT, *Good Italy Bad Italy. Why Italy Must Conquer Its Demons to Face the Future*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2012.

⁵ See also Pietro GRILLI DI CORTONA, *Il cambiamento politico in Italia. Dalla Prima alla Seconda Repubblica*, Carocci, Roma, 2007.

⁶ Notably, in an otherwise quiet good book, Massimo GIANNINI, *Lo statista. Il ventennio berlusconiano tra fascismo e populismo*, Baldini Castoldi Dalai, Milano, 2008.

democrats has also been defined "regime". Neither usage is fully appropriate from a political science point of view. Technically, regime defines the rules of the political and institutional game, the procedures, the institutions of a political system. It cannot be utilized to emphasize the protracted rule by one party or by one man unless they have proceeded forcibly to change the most important components of the regime itself. The fact is that, while the 1992-1994 period can, indeed, be defined a regime crisis, the 1994 and subsequent (minimal) changes do not amount to a change of regime. Incidentally, this is why I believe it is wrong to speak of a Second Republic since there has been no regime change. Nevertheless, all that has taken place then and in the subsequent years cannot be characterized as "politics in a normal country" (the subtitle of Newell's book).

In itself neither can the reform of the electoral law indicate that there has been a regime change. Nevertheless, some non-technical differences between the two electoral laws must be highlighted. First, the *Mattarellum* was but a poor and convolute adaptation of the electoral system chosen by the voters in a referendum (1993). On the contrary, the existing law, dubbed *Porcellum*, was a deliberate and successful attempt by the governing centre-right majority to fabricate in 2005 an electoral system that could prevent a sizeable victory by the centre-left. The *Mattarellum* was most certainly not the best of the so-called mixed-member electoral systems. The *Porcellum* is by far one of the worst proportional systems ever. On the whole, both contributed to the (re)shaping not so much of Italian parties and the party system, but of the electoral and the governing coalitions. None had enough constraining power to revitalize declining parties in a way similar to what the French run-off majority system has done.

Finally, throughout their respective life and implementation (*Mattarellum* 1994, 1996, 2001; *Porcellum* 2006, 2008, 2013) both were seriously criticized, made the target of several popular referendums (unfortunately, the "uncertain" jurisprudence of the Constitutional Court has sentenced that some of them could be not admitted) and, what matters the most, some sectors of the political class remain favorable to one of those electoral systems, other sectors put forward proposals technically and politically unacceptable. Hence, all analysts ought to come to the conclusion that, yes, in Italy the electoral transition goes on. Here is not the place to provide a detailed and critical evaluation of the reform proposals, most of them, at the same time, highly partisan and poorly drafted. Still, it is impossible not to put the blame on the electoral system(s) for the unsatisfactory performance of Italian democracy.

Anticipated by a serious and incisive reform of the electoral law for municipal and provincial governments (whose merits go the proponents of the electoral referendums), the reform of the national electoral law was supposed to be the first step in an ambitious process leading to a new model of government. The centre-left never found enough time nor any satisfactory unity of thought and action to launch an institutional project. Twenty years after, the situation has not improved. Berlusconi emphatically imposed his (received) views and his parliamentary majority passed a reform of 56 articles of the Constitution out of 139. No matter that complexity, confusion and, even, contradictions were the hallmark of the reform. The center-left immediately called for a popular referendum to defeat and cancel the entire package. Neither Berlusconi nor the leaders of the other centre-right parties campaigned in defense of their reform that was resoundingly rejected by the voters in June 2006. In any case, Berlusconi's reforms would have entailed a challenge not to the democraticness of the parliamentary Republic, but to the functionality of the political system. Though also interested in strengthening the powers of the Prime Minister, Berlusconi's paramount goal was, and

remains, the taming of the judiciary. Much to the credit of the judges themselves and of Italian public opinion, but also of the Constitutional design, the changing equilibrium among the three major institutions, executive, legislative, and judiciary, has not been affected. Twenty years of intense and hostile confrontations have not seen Berlusconi on the winning side of the reform of the judiciary. This may even be an understatement.

Governing a Parliamentary Democracy

In the light of the Italian tradition of government formation and demise, the post-1994 phase has offered at the same time some significant innovations and some perverse continuities. The most significant innovation is represented by the electoral and political imperative to construct pre-electoral coalitions whose leader had to be the candidate to the office of Prime Minister¹. The other, slightly disturbing, innovation has been the appearance of *non partisan governments*. There have also been two perverse continuities. The pre-electoral coalitions were bound to be heterogeneous. As a consequence, all governments proved to be quite unstable. In practice, in a twenty-year period, Italy has had twelve governments, but only seven Prime ministers. The average tenure of these governments, about fifteen months, hides some important elements. Berlusconi has led the longest Italian government ever: 1.410 days. Between 2001 and 2005 he has almost succeeded in completing one full parliamentary term at the helm of the same government. Rotation in office, that is, alternation in the government, that had entirely escaped the first phase of the Republic, has characterized all post-1994 elections. No coalition and no government have retained office following a general election.

The weakness of the governments is a product of two very different factors. On the one hand, Italian post-1994 political parties have shown to be fragile organizations, often litigious, either unwilling to sustain a strong leader (centre-left) or unable to go beyond the extreme personalization of politics fully enjoyed and happily exploited by Berlusconi. When Berlusconi's leadership was, for whatever reason, challenged, the centre-right proved unable to put forward a viable alternative. On the other hand, all parties had plunged to such low levels of prestige that, under some conditions, non-partisan governments appeared to be the temporary solution to the crisis of party government. The analysis of the evolution and working of Italian parties and the party system is a crucial endeavor for all those who attempt to understand what has gone wrong since 1994. As famously written in 1960 by the US political scientist E.E. Schattschneider and widely shared by the political science community, contemporary democracies are inconceivable without parties. All democracies are, indeed, "party democracies". Their differences derive from the kind and the number of parties existing in each political system and from the type of electoral political competition among them. No matter what kind of Constitution and which model of government (parliamentary, semipresidential, presidential) they have, the functioning of contemporary democracies is largely, in some cases, thoroughly, affected by their parties and their party systems.

¹ Additional details to be found in Eoin O'MALLEY, Francesco CAVATORTA, "Finding a Party and Losing Some Friends: Overcoming the Weaknesses of the Prime Ministerial Figure in Italy", *Contemporary Politics*, vol. 10, nos. 3-4, September-December 2004, pp. 271-286.

Democracy and Partyocracy

Italian democracy is an excellent example of a political system in which parties have been a dominant component from 1946 to 1992. So much so that the, admittedly, derogatory expression used to define Italian democracy was *partitocrazia*: hence, not power of the people, but power of the parties. There would be a lot, positive and negative, to say and still to be researched concerning the impact of *partitocrazia* on the way Italy was practically ruled and on its consequences. However, in my opinion what is more important is to understand whether Italian *partitocrazia* has survived and how the collapse of all Italian parties and the party system in 1994 has weakened Italian democracy. Ironically, an Italian social scientist and political commentator, Ilvo Diamanti, has remarked in several newspaper articles that the disappearance of the entrenched Italian parties of the past has been followed by the attempts of their rather weak successors to create a *partitocrazia*, exaggerated power in the hands of small parties. In Italy, mass parties do not exist any longer, but their successors have not renounced their old habits of extracting resources from the economic system, of resorting to clientelism and patronage, of controlling social and cultural activities focusing especially on the mass media and television. Nevertheless, party leaders have been unable to strengthen their organizations and to satisfactorily (re)connect with the voters. In Italy the crisis of representation is alive.

There has been one unique element of stability in the Italian party system. It was represented by Silvio Berlusconi's undisputed, unchallenged, irreplaceable role of leader of the centre-right or, in any case, of the largest party of the center-right. However, even Berlusconi's party has undergone some significant changes. At the beginning there was the political movement called "Forza Italia". It was utilized by Berlusconi as the core of successful coalition-building, especially so in 2001: the *Casa della Libertà* (House of Freedom). Influenced by the merger that in June 2007 led to the *Partito Democratico* (see below), Berlusconi felt somewhat obliged to counteract. In November 2007 Berlusconi announced his intention to create the *Popolo della Libertà* joining together *Forza Italia* and the National Alliance. In April 2008, the *Popolo della Libertà* became the federation of many centrist and right-wing parties sizably winning the general elections. The first Congress of the *Popolo della Libertà* was held at the end of March 2009, but Berlusconi's authoritarian caesaristic tendencies produced a reaction from the former leader of the National Alliance Gianfranco Fini. Between April and July 2010 the *Popolo della Libertà* had broken up, itself becoming a contributor to political and governmental instability.

When analyzing the evolution of the center-left, two elements stand out: the number of leaders who have followed each other and the restlessness of the party organizations. Between 1994 and 2013, the major party of the left, that is the successor party to the Italian Communist Party has had as many as eight secretaries (Achille Occhetto, Massimo D'Alema, Walter Veltroni, Piero Fassino, Walter Veltroni again, Dario Franceschini, Pier Luigi Bersani, Guglielmo Epifani). None of them ever fully acquired control over a factionalized party structure. The ninth secretary is in the making. The major party of the left has also changed its name twice: *Partito Democratico della Sinistra* and *Democratici di Sinistra* before merging into the *Partito Democratico* with former left-wing Christian Democrats, *La Margherita*, whose terminological whereabouts are well-nigh impossible to retrace. In any case, those whereabouts do not tell us anything of political significance. If the figure of the leader and the name of the party constitute cognitive shortcuts for a variety of disinterested, disaffected,

disappointed voters, then the center left was increasing the disorientation of their potential voters, not making their electoral and political life easier. To make things worse in the two (out of six) electoral contests won by the centre-left, the candidate, Romano Prodi, kept a deliberate distance from identifying with any of the major parties.

The situation is not at all better when looking to the other parties and/or lists putting up candidates at the parliamentary elections, obtaining votes, winning seats. In the Parliament elected in February 2013, there is only one party that was already present in 1994: the Northern League. The oldest among the other parties is the *Partito Democratico*, officially born in 2007. The newest, rejecting the label party, is the *MoVimento 5 Stelle*, which at its electoral debut has received even more votes than *Forza Italia* in 1994. All the other parties are the product of splits and mergers leading to other mergers and other splits, exploiting some socio-political niches and winning some parliamentary representation only thanks to some clauses of the existing proportional electoral law. Italy offers to the critics of proportional electoral laws an excellent example that proportionality does mean representativeness, but it may translate into fragmentation, incessant negotiations, skewed bargaining, and the politics of blackmail¹.

The Presidency of the Republic

If Italian parties have become a collection of fragile, fluctuating, litigious associations of unjustifiably ambitious small leaders, who and how has protected democracy and will do so in the foreseeable future? The outstanding feature of the post-1994 period has been represented by the role played by the Presidents of the Republic. The classic interpretation of the Presidency given by almost all constitutional lawyers was that of a largely ceremonial office. Only few experts wrote that what the Constitution makers had designed was an ambiguous role. In the Constituent Assembly, one firm conclusion had been reached that the Italian President had to be elected not by the Italian citizens at large, but by the parliamentarians and a number of representatives of the Regional Assemblies. The requirement that he had to "represent the national unity" was always considered more important than the Constitutional powers he was explicitly endowed with, namely: the appointment of the Prime Minister (and, on the latter's proposal, of all the Ministers) and the dissolution of Parliament (albeit following a consultation with the Speakers of the two Houses), according, respectively, to art. 92 and art. 88.

To make a long, but really interesting, story short², those two powers had never been used autonomously by the President(s). Most certainly, they had not been used independently from the wishes and preferences of the political parties or against them. The strength of the parties and, at least vis-à-vis the President, their joint attitude meant that the Presidents enjoyed a very limited sphere of discretionality. Though to some extent they could criticize party politics, something that was done

¹ Giovanni SARTORI, *Parties and Party Systems. A Framework for Analysis*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1976.

² The longer version can be found in Gianfranco PASQUINO, "Italian Presidents and their Accordion: Pre-1992 and Post-1994", *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol. 65, no. 5, October 2012, pp. 845-860.

especially by the very popular Sandro Pertini (1978-1985) and, in the second part of his term, by Francesco Cossiga (1985-1992), Italian Presidents were not supposed to take independent initiatives. When Giovanni Gronchi (1955-1962) appointed Fernando Tambroni a Prime Minister not indicated by the parties and disliked by them, an almost institutional crisis followed so that Tambroni quickly had to resign (March-July 1960). There was no subsequent attempt by any President to impose his candidate. However, between the 1992 and 1994 general elections, the crisis of the parties manifested itself in full bloom. In a way, against their constitutional convictions, all three Presidents elected since have felt obliged to use their powers to the utmost. Few, extremely relevant, examples will suffice.

The staunch defender of the prerogatives of Parliament (hence of the parties in Parliament), who had been elected almost entirely because of his previously expressed parliamentary credentials, Oscar Luigi Scalfaro (1992-1999) set the tone. In a sequence, he could first choose in a roster of names whom to appoint as Prime Minister (Giuliano Amato, 1992). Then, out of a partisan impasse, he appointed to that office the first non-parliamentarian ever, the Governor of the Bank of Italy Carlo Azeglio Ciampi (1993). Constitutionally obliged to recognize that Berlusconi had indeed mustered a parliamentary majority, in April 1994 Scalfaro appointed him Prime Minister, but then he exercised his constitutional power rejecting the appointment of Berlusconi's personal lawyer to the office of Minister of Justice. In December 1994, Scalfaro also refused an early dissolution of Parliament as requested by Berlusconi abandoned or "betrayed" by his cherished ally, the Northern League. Again unprecedentedly, Scalfaro solved the governmental crisis appointing a fully non-partisan government, dubbed "tecnico" (the reporter for *The New York Times* provided a better, not flattering, definition: "A government made of low-profile professionals"). The government led by Lamberto Dini enjoyed by all means Scalfaro's not hidden political and institutional support. In 1998, following the defeat of Prodi's government in a vote of confidence, Scalfaro found himself again in the position to reject Prodi's request for an early dissolution of Parliament. He masterminded or conspicuously contributed to the formation of D'Alema's government. At the end of his tormented term, Scalfaro had put to good use all the panoply of the presidential powers. Interestingly, he refrained from appointing any Senator for life.

Ciampi's presidential term (1999-2006) was by far less troubled by the delicate issues of appointing the Prime Minister and of dissolving or not the Parliament¹. Nevertheless, two more "special" issues made their appearance. According to the Constitution, the President gives his authorization to the bills the government itself wants to send to Parliament. Hence, informally, the President has the possibility and the right to point at some aspects of dubious constitutionality and/or politically questionable. Ciampi's advisors and Berlusconi's lawyers and collaborators clashed repeatedly, though not in the open, on some bills aimed at reducing the powers of the judiciary to investigate the activities of the Prime Minister. Eventually, the Constitutional Court cancelled those laws. Leaving aside the substance of the issue, President Ciampi imposed his view on a not minor detail, the allocation of the seat bonus in the election of the Senate, upon the Minister of Reform, Sen. Roberto Calderoli, responsible for drafting the law. Finally, the most important clash between the government and the

¹ A sympathetic account is provided by Massimo GIANNINI, *Ciampi. Sette anni di un tecnico al Quirinale*, Einaudi, Torino, 2006.

President took place on the bill to regulate radio and TV broadcasting. In November 2002, President Ciampi sent the text back to Parliament with a five-page message that contained his evaluation and suggestions for improving it along the lines of two fundamental criteria: pluralism and impartiality of information.

President Ciampi had no party backing of his own. Prime Minister Berlusconi was the leader of a large parliamentary majority. The Constitution had no specific provision. Unfortunately, no significant precedents existed to solve a major conflict of "institutional" opinions. Hence, introducing few, largely cosmetic, changes, the government sent his bill back to Parliament where Berlusconi's majority duly approved it a second time. Still, the President of the Republic has made his point and, if and when necessary, the Constitutional Court could "build" on Ciampi's remarks and critiques.

In all likelihood against his expectations, most certainly against his wishes, it is with the Presidency of Giorgio Napolitano that the elasticity of the constitutional powers of the President has made its full appearance. Also because of his superior knowledge of politics, that is, of the power relations among the different actors, and of his sense of the timing affecting those relations, Napolitano has played a dominant role during his first term. The highest point has been reached when, first, Napolitano persuaded the parliamentary leaders of the opposition to postpone a vote of censorship against Berlusconi, that, indeed, the incumbent Prime Minister survived (December 2010). The price was that Berlusconi had to prove not only that he was, in fact, supported by a *numerical* parliamentary majority, but that his majority was also *operational*. When it became clear that the second requirement could no longer be met, Napolitano persuaded Berlusconi to resign (November 2011) and replaced him with Professor Mario Monti whom he had purposefully appointed Senator for life few days before. Also because of its composition, Monti's government is to be considered the best example of a *non-partisan government*, none of its ministers having had any previous party affiliation¹. Since Napolitano also convinced the leaders of the major parliamentary parties to vote the confidence to Monti and to keep the government going, it is fair to say that Monti's was a "government of the President", built on Napolitano's prestige, moral suasion, political and institutional support.

Though Napolitano had solemnly declared that for reasons of age (b. 1925), but especially because he did not want to create the precedent of the re-election of the incumbent President, following some disturbing performance by the newly elected Parliament, he changed his mind. That is, he yielded to the humbled request by the leaders of the *Partito Democratico, Popolo della Libertà, Scelta Civica* (Monti's political vehicle) to accept to be elected to a second unprecedented term. His acceptance was not at all unconditional. In fact, President Napolitano has made it clear that he wanted to appoint a Prime Minister capable of constructing a viable governmental coalition including those three parties. The *governo delle larghe intese* (a government of wide agreements), almost a German/Austrian style Grand Coalition, bears Napolitano's imprint. What counts is that all political leaders are once more well aware that the government is fully supported by the President and that the ball of the game is firmly in his hands. More details could be offered, but I believe I have made it already

¹ Gianfranco PASQUINO, Marco VALBRUZZI, "Non-partisan Governments Italia-style: Decision-making and Accountability", *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, vol. 17, no. 5, December 2012, pp. 612-629.

clear enough that there has been a massive re-allocation of political and institutional powers away from the parties and Parliament toward the Presidency of the Republic. It remains to be seen whether this reallocation, depending on Napolitano's many personal and political assets/qualities, is temporary or whether it may anticipate and pave the way to a French-type semi-presidential Republic (openly disliked by Napolitano).

There are some political and institutional ironies in the behavior of Scalfaro and Napolitano. The most glaring of them is that, though both personally "guardians" of the parliamentary prerogatives and loyal lifetime party members, their Presidential performance necessarily meant a reduction of the powers both of Parliament and of the parties. President de Gaulle would be proud of them. Moreover and paradoxically, while Scalfaro was operating in a semi-presidential way, his name was utilized by an association spreading the message "*Salviamo la Costituzione*" ("Let us Save the Constitution", obviously not from Scalfaro's actions, but from Berlusconi's intentions). Located on the hill of the Quirinale, inevitably, both Presidents felt obliged to inject a fair amount of personalization into their performance, something that the political cultures of their partisan affiliation had always abhorred and rejected. Finally, will it be possible to revert to a "normal" Presidency after Napolitano's years and experience? Will it be necessary? Will it be advisable?

The Transition as an Institutional and Political Problem

There is no need to answer all these questions at this point. Nevertheless, if the overarching question is whether Italian democracy is at stake, the answer must be found in a closer analysis of the never-ending transition. Those who state that the transition is over are missing the core of Italian politics and will be unable to provide a satisfactory explanation of all the peculiar, not "normal" by any means, phenomena that have taken place since 1994. I have given enough emphasis to the role played and the powers wielded by the Presidency of the Republic. But I want to add that the Presidency cannot be analyzed in isolation since the powers of the President have a strong impact on the formation of the government and affect the dynamics and the very survival of Parliament. In fact, it is also slowly becoming quite clear to many analysts and practitioners that a bicameral symmetric Parliament is no longer sustainable. That a new well framed electoral law is necessary not only to select and choose better parliamentarians, capable of bridging the representational gap, but also to give more power to the voters. It has also been established that the electoral law must be a significant component of the institutional reform package, but in this case the proposals are highly partisan and often quite divergent. No technically and politically satisfactory solution is in sight. Moreover, eleventh hour accelerations in case of a sudden governmental crisis are to be feared because exposed to many contingent factors. Finally, that a systemic view is indispensable for satisfactorily reforming the three major institutions, the Presidency, Parliament, the government, though belatedly, seems to have been understood by the authorities that have proceeded to appoint, first a Committee of experts, then a bicameral parliamentary Committee.

All this said, however, the Italian problem is represented by the parties and the party system. There are only two parties worthy of this name and neither is strong and consolidated. The *Partito Democratico* is constantly engaged in internal struggles that have doomed some of its leaders and that discourage some potential voters. Not

only is the *Popolo della Libertà* on its way out to be replaced by a second version of *Forza Italia*, but for reasons of age its founder and leader may decide to exit. What will follow is going to be more complex than a succession crisis, because neither the *PdL* nor *Forza Italia* are organizations capable of surviving unless kept united and led by a strong personality. That there is a widespread dissatisfaction with the existing parties, especially, the largest ones, is certified by the stunning electoral success of the Five Stars Movement. The protest that fueled the Movement has come from the poor performance both of the *PdL* in government and of the *PD* in the opposition. Their weakness opened an electoral prairie for Beppe Grillo's political challenge. There is more in the Movement than just politically motivated (and justifiable) protest. There is a strong component of populism: the language (simplified and gross), the themes (for instance, the anti European Union rhetoric), the anti-establishment posture, the "us" against "them" (the politicians, the bankers, the intellectuals, the mass media and, subtly, the Jews). According to Grillo, the end is near. Traditional politicians would do better to surrender. Soon the Movement will win 100% of the seats: not exactly a liberal-constitutional goal. Not the contribution that is needed to end the transition by constructing a viable competitive pluralist political system. When a populist movement gets 25% of the popular vote, it seems preposterous to state that the politics of the country having nourished and harboring this phenomenon is normal.

Conclusions

From a purely, but quite important, point of view, it is undeniable that, though challenged, Italian democracy, meaning free and fair elections plus civil, political, social rights, has never been seriously at stake in the past twenty years. From a substantial point of view, the functioning of Italian democracy, its performance, its production of public policies, its transformation toward a more egalitarian condition have always shown glaring inadequacies and have rightly been exposed to criticisms. More recently, I would like to call the attention to two phenomena. Mario Monti's government (November 2011-December 2012) has been accused of having "suspended" Italian democracy because it did not have any electoral mandate. Even though Monti's non-partisan government could not point to any mandate received from the voters, it was fully legitimate according to the Constitution because the government had received the vote of confidence both from the House of Deputies and the Senate. It kept this confidence and tapped on it in order to have several of its bills approved by Parliament. Perhaps, to some extent, Monti's government is also to be considered a good testimony of the flexibility of the parliamentary models.

The second phenomenon I want to highlight is that from 1994 up to now Italian politics has been marked by repeated confrontations and clashes especially those pitting at different points in time the governments led by Berlusconi against the judiciary, but not only, the Constitutional Court, against the Presidency of the Republic and, to a lesser, though not to be minimized, extent, against Parliament. None of these confrontations and clashes has produced lasting, negative consequences. Berlusconi has not succeeded to "tame" the judiciary, to relegate the Presidency of the Republic to a minor role, to make the Italian Parliament a rubber stamp institution. Briefly, my overall evaluation is that all Italian institutions have proved to be remarkably resilient, capable of obliging all the protagonists not to overstep the rules of the constitutional-democratic game.

The persistence of democracy in Italy ought not to be considered in question. The quality of democracy is most certainly questionable. Since the late 1970's when the secretary of the Socialist Party Bettino Craxi launched the idea of a *Grande Riforma*, many formal and informal attempts have been made to formulate proposals and solutions leading to the stabilization and the strengthening of Italian governments. Though which "strengthening" remains controversial and somewhat obscure. So far, only the electoral law has been revised, for the better in 1993-1994 following a popular referendum, for the worse in 2005 implementing the highly partisan preferences of the centre-right governmental coalition. For many politicians interested in retaining and enhancing their chances of re-election and their political power, the electoral law continued to be an obscure object of desire or an object of obscure desires. Not only a discussion of the various, often technically very poor, proposals would require a paper of its own, but it would be totally useless because Italian parliamentarians have expressed widely divergent views and seem unable to come to any lasting agreement. In all likelihood, a forthcoming sentence of the Constitutional Court on some features of the existing electoral law will oblige Parliament to approve few minor adjustments.

Leaving aside my preferences for the entire structural arrangement of the Fifth French Republic, that has considerably modernized French politics¹, I am convinced, and I hope to have demonstrated, that what makes the Italian situation less promising compared with other similar democratic political systems is the party system. Following Schattschneider's intelligent and inspiring perspective², I began by stressing that contemporary democracies are party democracies. When the quality of the parties is poor and the party system is unable to structure a decent competition, the democratic framework itself is bound to suffer. Were the Italian *Partito Democratico* willing to agree to the popular election of the President of the Republic, as requested by the centre-right, provided Berlusconi and his allies reciprocate accepting the run-off majority electoral system utilized in France, a new phase of Italian politics will begin. In fact, such "virtuous exchange" promises both to introduce renewed vitality and political dynamism into stagnating Italian politics and to restructure the parties and the party system. Unfortunately, no major political figure has so far shown enough courage to pursue the virtuous exchange. Hence, no revival of representative party organizations and no restructuring of the party system are in sight. Italian democracy will continue to be based on weak and conflict-ridden parties and it will exhibit a poor quality in terms of electoral accountability, political representation, and governmental decision-making.

¹ Gianfranco PASQUINO, Sofia VENTURA (eds.), *Una splendida cinquantenne. La Quinta repubblica francese*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2010.

² Elmer E. SCHATTSCHNEIDER, *Party Government*, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, New York, 1942.