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**Government law-making in Italy:  
The important role of the recently created coalition agreements**

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## Summary

The drafting of a coalition agreement does represent a crucial arena for partners in parliamentary governments: it allows them to reach, even before the executive is in place, the necessary compromise (and eventually “package deals”) over a set of policies to implement, and on the content of the main laws to promote. The coalition agreement could also be more than a programmatic platform: defining, for instance, special rules to solve future intra-coalitional conflicts. A coalition agreement, thus, could play an extremely important role in limiting the transaction costs intrinsically related to the formation and implementation of important government (legislative) decisions. Being of exploratory nature, this paper wants to analyze the role of coalition agreements recently implemented by the Italian governments. In the first part, the literature about coalition agreements as a decision-making arena is presented. In the second part, the characteristics of the coalition agreements drafted by the Prodi I government (in 1996) and by the Berlusconi II government (in 2001) are then analyzed. In a final part, we present some empirical evidences on to what extent the coalition agreements drafted by these two governments have functioned as point of reference for the process of government decision making: to what extent the bills the Council of Ministers has approved and presented to the parliament are linked to the goals of the coalition agreement? And conversely: to what extent the *pledges* included in coalition agreements have been transferred into governmental decisions. And again, incidentally: does the drafting of a coalition agreement facilitate the adoption of *significant* legislation by the executive? And is this legislation also relatively more *conflictual* in parliament?

**Key-words:** Cabinet, party government, coalition, Italy, law-making.

## Introduction

The law-making represents a particularly critic and demanding task for coalition governments: laws are blueprints for policies to be constructed: they set the main objectives of a given policies and point out their priorities. In coalition governments, the process of law-making demands the cooperation between ministers and parliamentarians whose preferences may perhaps diverge and which have natural incentives to compete for gaining electoral support. Particularly, the ideological range between political parties (Tsebellis 1999), and high transaction costs (North 1990), might affect negatively the capability of the executive to promote (significant) legislation.

The drafting of a coalition agreement, or more in general of a common programmatic platform, might represents a crucial arena for government actors, to reach, even before the executive is in place, the necessary compromise over a set of policies to implement, and on the content of the main laws to promote. The coalition agreement may define special rules to solve anticipated conflicts. Moreover, because all policies are decided together, the draft of the coalition agreement might allows “package deals”, so that a veto on a policy will be removed in exchange of the renouncement of a coalition partner’s veto on another policy. In consequence this instrument may be extremely important in limiting the transaction costs intrinsically related to the formation and implementation of important government (legislative) decisions.

Being of exploratory nature, this paper wants to analyze the role of coalition agreements recently used by the Italian government. This paper addresses this role in two arenas: in the executive and in the Parliament. In the first part, the literature about coalition agreements as a decision-making arena is presented. In the second part, the characteristics of the coalition agreements drafted by the Prodi I government (in 1996) and by the Berlusconi II government (in 2001) are then analyzed. In a third section, we present some empirical evidences on the impact that they had on the decisions taken by these two executives: the question being to what extent the coalition agreements have functioned as point of reference for the whole process of government decision-making. The final part of the paper addresses the role of the coalition agreements in Parliament and the relation between coalition agreements and the law-making by the two governments under scrutiny. Does the drafting of a coalition agreement facilitate the adoption of *significant* legislation? And is this legislation also relatively more *conflictual* in parliament (De Winter 2002)?

Since very little done about coalition agreements in Italy, this paper is of explanatory nature, and aims to bring the first pieces of a consolidated theory about the role of coalition agreement for policy-making in Italy.

## **I. Coalition Agreements as Determinants of the Relationship Between Parties and Between Principal and Agent**

Recent interest amongst scholars for coalition governance has explained an increase in literature in the last years. We can divide them in two groups, one which looks at the coalition agreement as an inter-party tool, and another which look at the coalition agreement as a contract between government and supporting parties.

### **COALITION AGREEMENT AS AN INTER-PARTY TOOL**

Indeed, coalition agreements have been said to be potentially able to soften the transaction costs of intracoalitional decision-making: they, at least, should be able to provide coalition members with standard, in a sense institutionalised, ways and devices to handle transactions. From this point of view, to the extent that coalition agreements mention explicitly some mechanisms for the solution of intra-coalitional conflicts, they are likely to have an indirect influence on the legislative behaviour and performance of governments: at least because they provide feasible paths for solving legislative gridlock and stalemate circumstances. But coalition agreements may also have a more direct influence on the outcomes of the government law-making, should they include a set of specific agreed upon policy goals to be achieved by the executive (Peterson and De Ridder 1986; Timmermans 2003, Moury 2005).

The broader this set of policy goals, the reasoning goes, the less likely it is that individual governing actors (individual ministers) will pursue their preferences independently from the preferences and wills of other actors, when taking decisions on issues under their jurisdiction. De Winter (2004), on this regard, has theorised a direct link between the policy statements enclosed in the governing coalition agreements<sup>1</sup>, and the legislative actions promoted by the executive. A Government policy agreement, in his view, is a crucial device in linking party policy preferences to government policy outputs; It constitutes an agenda of government policy priorities: so that “there is a high probability that bills that cover a policy problem that was mentioned in the government declaration, tackle more salient [...] problems, than bills that was not mentioned” (De Winter 2004: 36-37).

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<sup>1</sup> De Winter uses “the term ‘government declarations’ to cover two main types of documents. In single-party governments, it concerns the governing party’s legislative program presented to parliament at the beginning of its term, and reflects the party electoral manifesto. In multi-party governments, it usually concerns a written coalition policy agreement, whose content is presented by the PM in an abridged version to parliament at its investiture (or equivalent legislative kick-off session of the new government)” (De Winter 2004:35).

## COALITION AGREEMENT AS A TOOL TO LIMIT AGENCY LOSSES

The principal agent literature sees party government as a process of delegation, where principals and agents have diverging priorities. Strøm (2000) considers party government as a process of delegation from the party-principal to the government-agent. Delegation to the government from the parties occurs because the government is presumed to have more resources and competencies to draft legislative policy initiatives than parliamentary parties or party organisations. Andeweg (2000) also correctly points out that ministers are ‘double agents’ of the government and of political parties. Müller (2000) considers party government as a chain of delegation, whereby each link attaches a principal to an agent (voters to the MPs, MPs to government, government to individual ministers and ministers to civil servants) and where the interaction of parties structures each step of the delegation. Moreover, Müller underlines that there is, in parallel to the delegation from MPs to government, a delegation *between* the party in government and the party organisation.

The well-known problem about delegation is known as ‘agency loss’ – in our case the possibility that ministers, rather than obeying to their parties, may also focus on their own priorities. Governmental declarations and coalition agreements could use serve to reduce agency-loss, as they stipulate the legitimate expectations of the principal vis-à-vis the agent (Blondel and Cotta 1996: 225, Weller 1997: 57)’.

Thus, in the literature, many of these recent contributions stress the role of the coalition agreement for policy-making. These however focus on post-electoral coalitions. Indeed, as Nadenicheck Golder (2006: 194-195) points out, since Duverger’s discussion of pre-electoral coalitions in the fifties, little theoretical or empirical research on this has been published. If we find out that that the coalition agreement has a role in policy-making in Italy, where it is no institution of drafting such a document, this will be a strong supplementary evidence that coalition agreement, indeed, play an important role for coalition governments regarding the task of making policy.

## II. Two Governments Under Scrutiny

In order to test these hypotheses we decided to choose two cases from amongst the cabinets in Italy (Second Republic) in the nineties. Italy is considered as a “less probable case”, because there

is no culture of drafting a coalition agreement, but where it has been occasionally done before the elections (for Prodi I, Berlusconi II and Prodi II).

**Table 1: Cases selected and proportion of party leaders who entered the government**

Cabinets	Parties	Proportion of party leaders who entered the government
Prodi I (1996-98)	DS, PPI, RI, UD, Verdi	None of the party leaders of the important parties entered the government
Berlusconi II (2001-2005)	FI, AN, LN, CDU-UDC	All party leaders in government

Abbreviations: DS: Democratici di Sinistra (Italian Leftist Party), PPI: Parti Popolare Italiano (Italian Popular Party), RI: Rinnovamento Italiano (Italian Renewal), UD: Unione Democratica (Demoratic Union), FI: Forza Italia, AN: Alleanza Nazionale (National Alliance), LN: Lega Norte (Northern League), CDU-UDC: Cristiani Democratici Uniti – Unione Christiana Democratica (Italian Christian Democrats).

## **PRODI I GOVERNMENT**

### Pre-electoral formation

After having lost the 1994 election and after the failure of Occhetto to be elected leader of the party, the Democratici di Sinistra moved towards an ‘opening to the centre’. Prodi’s proposal, in 1995, to ally the left party into a governmental coalition, Ulivo (Olive Tree), and to be Premier in the probable future government, was then accepted by the leftist Democrat Party (Democratici di Sinistra). In consequence, in order to attract the centre electorate, the leftist Democrat Party (which was the biggest party of the coalition) accepted not to lead the government. Bertinotti’s Communist Party was not invited to belong to their coalition, because of the anti-system beliefs of the party. At the beginning, Ulivo was conceived of as a partnership between Democratici di Sinistra and a future federation of small parties (Popolari, Democratici-patto Segni, Alleanza Democratica and Socialisti Italiani). Among these, only the former (PPI) was sure to obtain more than 4% of the vote.

However, the expected duration of the Dini government and the unwillingness of the small parties to cease autonomy (in particular Verdi e Popolari) changed the situation. Furthermore, in mid-1995, during a meeting aiming to decide strategies and programs<sup>2</sup> (Vertici Del Ulivo) many lines of division appeared amongst the partners, especially on institutional reform. Finally, at the

<sup>2</sup> Participants at this meeting were D’Alema (Pds), Bianco (PPI), Segni (Patto Segni), Bordon (Alleanza Democratica), Boselli (Socialisti Italiani), La Malfa (Pri), Orlando (La Rete), Ripa di Meana (we Verdi), Zanone (Federazione dei Liberali), Spini (Federazione Laburista), Scheietroma (Pdsi), Carniti (Cristano-Sociali) and Petrini (Lega).

presentation of the program in autumn, three parties (Patto Segni, Socialisti Italiani and Verdi) left the coalition. In mid-February however, the convocation of new elections encouraged the union of parties, so that ‘the political alliance under difficulty (...) got transformed into an efficient electoral partnership’ (Di Virgilio 1996: 535). Counting all the small parties, this partnership was composed of 23 voices.

Electoral efficiency was enabled, among other things, by an electoral agreement with the Communists so that in some constituencies the Communists were allowed to present themselves as the sole candidates of the left (and in consequence, we found a between electoral alliance and governmental alliance, in order to get the majority into the Parliament). This ‘desistance agreement’ with the Communists de-dramatised the ideological extension problem. The cohesion of the majority was sacrificed for this electoral efficiency. Indeed Ulivo presented itself as a ‘team against a common enemy rather than a programmatic and governmental majority’ (Di Virgilio 1996: 536).

### Post-electoral formation

The electoral result was not at all an overwhelming victory for Ulivo: it obtained a small majority in the Senate, but needed the votes of the Communists in order to get a majority in the Chamber. Democratici di Sinistra gained some seats; Verdi maintained its score and the PPI ensured a dominant position in relation to the other centre parties. Dini’s list did less well than the other centre lists (Pop-svp-pri-ud). In consequence, the four major centre-left parties were the Communists (5.7% of the votes for the left in the Chamber), Democratici di Sinistra (40.5%), Verdi (5.9%) and PPI (24.4%). Prodi was the obvious Prime Minister. He did not belong officially to any party<sup>3</sup> and claimed to represent only the coalition. On 17th May, Prodi presented the list of his ministers. Ciampi and Dini, technicians leading the previous government, obtained the Treasury and the Foreign Affairs Ministry respectively. The biggest party of the coalition, Democratici di Sinistra, got 9 out of 20 ministers (deputy Prime Ministership, Internal Affairs, Education, Finance, Industry, Social Solidarity, Equal Opportunity, Public Service and Regions and Transport) while Rinnovamento Italiano and Popolari each got 3 Ministerships (Foreign Affairs, Welfare and Foreign Commerce for the first, and Defence, Agriculture and Health for the second). The Greens and Unione Democratica each obtained one Ministership (Environment and Communication respectively).

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<sup>3</sup> Prodi has always been close to the Democratici di Sinistra (DC), which offered him several prestigious positions as a minister or top public manager. In consequence, he was considered to be close to the Partito Popolare, the DC’s main successor. When he left the government, he became the driving force behind the creation of a new party, the Democrats for Prodi.

The party leaders of the two biggest parties of the coalition did not join the government (Democratici di Sinistra D'Alema and Popolari Bianco<sup>4</sup>). On the contrary, two leaders of the smallest party, who also participated in the draft of the program, entered the government, namely Dini (Foreign Affairs) and Maccanico (Communication, leader of Unione Democratica)<sup>5</sup>. There were 3 technicians (Ciampi, Di Pietro<sup>6</sup> and Flick). It is interesting to note that the ministers (non-technicians) were generally the party members who were most in favour of the coalition. For example, the Leftist Democrat Veltroni was very close to Prodi and a strong supporter of the Ulivo project, contrary to the party leader D'Alema. The former entered the government. Similarly, many ministers were recruited from the group of party members who were strongly in favour of the coalition.

### Characteristics of the coalition agreement

Ulivo's program is called 'Le 88 tesi', and was composed by Prodi and a group of seven 'wise people'. The document was ratified afterwards by the party congresses; the Greens did not vote for the program however (because they were not convinced by the environmental pledges) and Patto Segni and Socialisti Italiani opposed the part on institutional reforms.

The 'tesi dell'Ulivo' covers a broad range of arguments and is quite ambitious, but leaves some important room for manoeuvre in terms of concrete implementation. One of the most significant features dealt with constitutional reforms, such as a 'government of the Prime Minister' and the development of federalism. The formulation of the new institutional reform was left to the Parliament, and the coalition agreement proposes the installation of a bicameral commission for such reforms. The central part of the coalition agreement concerns economic policy, including control of inflation, participation in EMU in the first phase and privatisation. Employment was presented as the government's key priority, and suggested means of increasing employment included education, increased pressure on the unemployed to accept a job, the creation of jobs in the tertiary sector, and the introduction of more flexibility in the job market (to be negotiated by trade unions). Finally, the accent was put on the pro-European attitude of Italy. The coalition agreement contains 296 real pledges (only a few rhetorical pledges), which is quite a significant number in comparison to the average of the pre-electoral program. The great majority of the pledges are imprecise (223), and firm (274). However the chapters on State reform are soft, as the coalition agreement's authors insist on the need to dialogue with the opposition on these reforms. This can

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<sup>4</sup> Replaced in 1997 by Marini.

<sup>5</sup> Bordon, leader of one of the factions of the Unione Democratica, became Under-Secretary of Cultural Affairs.

<sup>6</sup> In November 1996, Di Pietro resigned after being accused of abuse of public office, and was replaced by Costa.



also be explained by the fact that consensus among Ulivo's parties was impossible to obtain on this subject.

The governmental declaration, even if enunciated six months after the publication of the coalition agreement, is basically a vague summary of the latter. Indeed almost all of the pledges (29 out of 33, the 4 others concerning details of implementation) of the governmental declaration were already included in the coalition agreement. Prodi moreover, insisted several (13) times on the necessity to respect the coalition agreement as it had previously been drafted. The governmental declaration stressed six basic points: 1) State reform (especially regionalisation), 2) constitutional reform, 3) budget equilibrium, employment and Mezzogiorno, 4) civil development, including school reform, welfare state and family, 5) justice reform and finally, 6) defence and international affairs.

Finally, the governmental declaration acknowledged points in common with Rifondazione Comunista, and the wish of the government to be the government of 'all Italians' and to collaborate with the opposition. These points were not included in the coalition agreement, and this is logical: the coalition agreement is made for the government, while the governmental declaration is made by the government for the Parliament. In other words, Prodi dedicated a part of the governmental declaration to the minority parliamentary groups, because it was a minority government, and more generally because the governmental declaration is addressed to the whole Parliament.

## BERLUSCONI II GOVERNMENT

### Pre-electoral formation

As observed above, the composition of the coalition in Italy since 1994 has been decided before the elections, as two coalitions of the centre-right and centre-left respectively, opposed each other during the elections. The electoral campaign of the centre-right coalition, the 'Casa della Liberta' started several months before the elections. This coalition was composed of six parties. It was formed by the three parties who had already presented themselves in the elections of 1996 (Berlusconi's Forza Italia, ex-fascist Alleanza Nazionale and Christian Democrats Biancofiore<sup>7</sup>), to which the Regionalist Lega Nord, and two other very small parties (Socialists 'Nuovo Psi' and Republicans Partito Repubblicano) were added.

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<sup>7</sup> New label under which CCD and CDU were grouped together after the elections of 1996, the name of which changed to UDC in March 2001.

The Lega Nord allied with the centre-right in 1994 but left the Berlusconi government after a few months in office (which caused the government's resignation). In the following elections of 1996, the Lega Nord did not ally with the centre-right and certainly contributed to the electoral failure of the latter. Since the Lega's position on the left-right axis was ambiguous (it was notably considered to be more leftist than its partners from the Polo (Campus 2002)), its alliance strategy remained unclear for a long time. After their defection from the Berlusconi government in 1994, the Lega was not considered in the beginning as a proper electoral partner. As time passed, it became evident that the Lega would probably be necessary for the centre-right to win the elections, who tried to ally with the Lega. These attempts were successfully concretised in the regional elections of April 2000. A few months later, the alliance 'Casa della Libertà' was officially announced. Commentators were sceptical about the ability of the Lega to campaign without colliding with its partners, especially Alleanza Nazionale, but no divergence surfaced during the campaign and the centre-right managed to diffuse an image of internal cohesion (Campus 2002).

The centre-right coalition presented diverse electoral programs, including 'a letter to the Italian people' sent to all centre-right activists and made public on the website of Forza Italia, the 'governmental plan for the legislature', published on the website of Forza Italia but recognised by all parties, and the 'contract with the Italian people' signed on television with five broad pledges and the engagement of Berlusconi to leave political life in case of non-fulfilment. According to Strøm and Müller's definition, the coalition agreement is 'the longest, *most binding, written* statements to which the parties of a coalition commit themselves, *we.e.* the most authoritative document that constrains party behaviour' (1999). In consequence, we consider the 'governmental plan' as the coalition agreement. This program was presented on the website only one week before the elections, after which centre-left politicians accused the Casa della Libertà of not having a program. Contrary to Prodi, it is difficult to assess who participated in the draft of the coalition agreement. This agreement suddenly appeared on the web without journalists having reported anywhere that negotiations were going on. The document appeared on the website of Forza Italia, but all parties of the coalition recognised it afterwards as their official program. Journalists however, reported a pact between Berlusconi and Bossi, in order to convince Bossi to give his support to the government. Indeed a further federalisation of the country ('devolution'), dear to Bossi's party, was included in the program. Furthermore the economic part of the program was almost identical to G. Tremonti's book on economy, and we can safely assume that it was he who drafted (with Berlusconi's supervision) the economic part of the coalition agreement. Finally, Berlusconi's closest collaborator, G. Letta, probably participated in the draft as well. The document contains some elements of the partners' program (devolution, on behalf of Lega Nord and financial measures

for the South, on behalf of Alleanza Nazionale), but interestingly these same parts are relatively short. On the contrary, much more accent is put on the program of Forza Italia (see above).

### Post-electoral formation

In the election of 13th May 2001, the centre-right coalition gained an ample majority in both chambers. The percentages of proportional votes show that the electoral weight of Berlusconi's party was much larger than those of its allies (29.4% of proportional votes for Forza Italia, 12% for Alleanza Nazionale, 3.9% for Lega Nord and 3.2% for Biancofiore). The new cabinet included 15 ministers and 10 ministers without portfolios. More precisely, 5 non-political ministers were chosen by Berlusconi<sup>8</sup> (4 with portfolios), 10 ministers for Forza Italia (6 with portfolios), 5 for Alleanza Nazionale (4 with portfolios), 3 for Lega Nord (2 with portfolios), and 2 for Biancofiore (none with portfolios). It is interesting to note that the most crucial portfolios for the realisation of the program are entrusted to Forza Italia members or to technocrat members who were former negotiators (Campus 2002); the majority of the pledges are related to portfolios of Economy and Finance, Public Works, Interior Affairs, Education and Welfare. Four of these five portfolios belonged to a member of Forza Italia or to a technocrat.

Almost all party leaders participated in the government. The Prime Minister's post went to Forza Italia's party leader Berlusconi, who was seconded by a deputy Prime Minister, Fini (party leader of Alleanza Nazionale) and Bossi (party leader of Lega Nord), as Minister of Institutional Reform. Only the leader of UDC<sup>9</sup> did not join the government. Instead, Buttiglione joined the government as Minister of European Affairs. All four belonged to a new organ inside the government, the Cabinet Council. In Italy, the participation of almost all party leaders in the government is unprecedented: in the First Republic, party leaders directed the government's action from outside, and during the centre-left coalition such a tradition of not cumulating party leadership with a ministerial post was kept alive. The reason for the change was an attempt to combat instability, as it was assumed to be more difficult for a parliamentary party to vote against its government when its leader was a member of the cabinet.

### Characteristics of the coalition agreement

The coalition agreement is composed of 215 real pledges, most of them firm and imprecise. Due to the majority of rhetorical and imprecise pledges, the coalition agreement received a score of

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<sup>8</sup> Campus 2002.

<sup>9</sup> New label under which CCD and CDU have been grouped since March 2001.

0.25 on the preciseness scale (Moury 2004a). The document is more complete than precise however, as it scored 0.75 on the completeness scale.

The 'governmental plan for the legislature' presents five missions to 'change Italy' and five strategies to 'better the life of the Italian people'. The first mission to re-organise all State apparatus, proposes to elaborate on-line services, e-government, and to reform public administration. The second mission concerns the reform of State institutions and proposes a stronger executive, less MPs and attribution of competencies to the regions in Education, Health and Defence. The third mission intends to reform laws and codes, the fourth one to elaborate important public works, and the last mission is concerned with reforming the South. The first and fourth mission contained much more pledges than the others, and as noted above, devolution and the plan for helping the South (particularly cherished by Alleanza Nazionale and Lega Nord) are composed all together by only 8 pledges.

The part of the program exposing the five strategies is longer than the first section. The first strategy contains plans for prosperity (fiscal reform, flexibility in work, reduction of public deficit, liberalisation and 'new economy'), is the longest one and includes the bigger proportion of real and precise pledges. The part on welfare is much more imprecise but almost as long as the later section and contains, amongst other things, the engagement to raise pensions to 500 euros per month (taking into consideration family health and age). It is interesting to note a brief paragraph on ethics, which was important for the Christian parties (promising regulation in genetics and assisted procreation, support of maternity, prevention of abortion and the fight against euthanasia). The third strategy, to prevent crime, is very broad, including both regulation of clandestine immigration, measures in penal justice and some judicial reform (including separation of judges and public ministries). The strategy for education proposes a new reform for schools and is less clear on universities and on research. Finally, the last strategy is formed by imprecise pledges on environment, energy and agriculture.

The governmental declaration, as Prodi's, mentions the wish to be the Prime Minister of all Italians and to respect the rights of minorities. The governmental declaration included the main points of the governmental program<sup>10</sup>, but interestingly, we observed a change in the order of the exposition of the points: the first exposed points in the governmental declaration concern international politics (friendship with Europe and the United States and the need to help the world's poorest countries). This insistence in the governmental declaration on helping the poorest countries comes from the imminence of the international G8 conference in Genoa, and the risk of having

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<sup>10</sup> Federalisation of the State, State reform, information society, school, reduction of the volume of laws, reduction of taxes, public works, justice reform, reform of welfare and resolution of Berlusconi's conflicts of interest.

violent demonstrations such as been the case in Germany a few days before. The second point was the federalisation of the State, a subject dear to Lega Nord.

### **III. Coalition Agreement and Executive Policy-Making**

Assessing the role of the coalition agreement for ministers is basically answering to two research questions: 1) what the proportion of the coalition agreement which has been transferred into governmental decisions is and 2) how many governmental decisions are based on the coalition agreement.

#### PROPORTION OF THE COALITION AGREEMENT TRANSFERRED INTO GOVERNMENTAL DECISIONS

In order to evaluate the implementation of the coalition agreement we intend to calculate the proportion of pledges it contains that have been transferred into governmental decisions. The method we employ is the same as the one used by Royed (1996) and subsequently by Thomson (1999) to calculate the proportion of electoral pledges fulfilled. This technique has proved to be very reliable and consists in identifying pledges in the electoral program (for us the coalition agreement) and checking for their fulfilment. Regarding the pledges identification, Royed distinguished between ‘definite’ pledges (pledges objectively and directly testable), ‘difficult definite’ pledges<sup>11</sup> (pledges for which testing is objective but requires further analysis) and ‘rhetorical’ pledges (pledges which are not objectively testable). She tested the fulfilment of the two former types of pledges, which are objectively testable. The selection of testable pledges is a key point of the analysis, as it is crucial to get objective measures of fulfilment. Thomson, for his part, distinguishes between pledges about actions and pledges about outcomes, and considers, as we will do, only pledges about actions in his analysis.

After identifying the pledges, the authors propose to check the fulfilment looking at each pledge and checking whether we could find a governmental decision that was congruent with the proposal supported in the pledge. For example, if we wanted to check the transfer into governmental decision of the pledge ‘proposing a bill on equal opportunities at work’, we would first read analyses of the legislature made by journalists and political scientists. If these documents mentioned the presentation of such a bill by the government, we would then consider the pledge as fulfilled. About half of the pledges fulfilled were mentioned in such reports: very often observers

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<sup>11</sup> That we will call precise and imprecise respectively.

(above all journalists before the election) draft reports about the pledges fulfilled by each government. If no information were found in such experts' and journalists' reports, we would then search in the CD ROM database provided by the government (collecting all ministerial decisions of the legislature), using key words (in our example, 'equal opportunities', 'gender', 'female', 'work', etc.). If we found in the database a bill on equal opportunities at work, the pledge was considered as fulfilled. If, after having tried with several key words, we could not, then the pledge was considered as having not been fulfilled. For budgetary pledges, we would rely more on summaries of financial bills as presented by the Council of Ministers to the press and as experts' reviews to their public, in order to see whether the budgetary pledges were congruent with governmental decisions.

We decided to consider that a pledge had been transferred into governmental decisions when it was either 'fully fulfilled' or 'partially fulfilled' by the government and this for two reasons. The first reason had to do with the reliability of the coding. As it appeared to me during the research, Thomson found that the two-category distinction between 'fully fulfilled or partially fulfilled' and 'not fulfilled' was more reliable than the three-category distinction between 'not fulfilled', 'partially fulfilled' and 'fully fulfilled'<sup>12</sup>. The second motivation is related to our research question: we do not aim to check the extent to which parties respect their electoral pledges; rather we want to find out what is the importance for the government of a document negotiated in advance between the parties. A partial fulfilment then, even without fully realising the pledges, is still an indicator of the importance (even if only symbolical) of the document for the government. In other words, what was important to me was to find out whether the government is bound by the coalition agreement, not whether the government respects its pledges regarding the citizens (or the Parliament). In the first case, what matters is that the bill fulfilling the coalition agreement is taken, in the second it is that the bill really provides the desired outcome.

For the same reason, we did not carry out a qualitative assessment of the quality of each governmental decision. In the example above, if the coalition agreement mentioned a bill on equal opportunities at work, and the government subsequently presented such a bill, the pledge was considered as fulfilled, without considering whether the bill was really efficient in increasing equal opportunities at work or not. Similarly, we did not consider whether the bill has been implemented or not, and we stopped our analysis at the presentation by the government of a bill, without following its outcome in the Parliament. Since a very great majority of the bills are taken for

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<sup>12</sup> The dichotomous fulfilment was identified as strongly reliable and the three-category fulfilment was only identified as satisfactory. 'Subject area specialists were asked to judge the fulfilment of 110 of the pledges made prior to the 1994 elections in the Netherlands. On the basis of the three-category measurement of fulfilment, there was inter-coder reliability, measured by Cohen's Kappa, of 0.70. For the dichotomous fulfilment variable there was a Cohen's Kappa of 0.78. As a rule of thumb, Kappa values of around 0.60 are generally considered to be satisfactory, where values of around 0.80 is strongly reliable' (Thomson 2001: 195).

government which lasted their entire duration, it is less the case for government which fall prior to their legal term, above all for the Prodi government<sup>13</sup>. Looking at the positive vote (or amendments) of bills in the Parliament, and at the implementation of bills, will be carried on the second part of this paper. In sum, we are very ‘generous’ with governments: we consider a pledge transferred into governmental decision when a decision has been taken by the government, in the direction indicated by the pledge and without controlling whether the desired outcome has been reached or not. Here we contrast with Royed and Thomson, who have been testing the mandate theory.

**Table 2: Examples of pledges included in the coalition agreement and of their transfer into governmental decisions**

<b>Government</b>	<b>Pledge</b>	<b>Type of pledges</b>	<b>Partial or full fulfilment</b>
Prodi I, 1996	Reinforcement of power of antitrust authority	Precise	Yes
Berlusconi II, 2001	Creation of more on line services for citizens	Precise	Yes
Berlusconi II, 2001	Training offers especially for Southern Italians	Precise	No

The main plausible criticisms of this method are that it does not attribute any index of importance to the pledges. That is why we will address a measure of the importance of bills in the second part. This defect however is much less important than it seems, because usually the more pledges on an issue, the more the issue can be considered as salient for parties. There are some exceptions however, as it may occur that very sensitive policies are not described at length in the coalition agreement, but are still very important reforms, such as the ‘devolution reform’ (further federalisation) in Berlusconi’s coalition agreement (3 pledges only out of 183) but we even argue that this not a problem at all, because what we want to calculate is the extent to which the government is bound by the party program. If an important reform is promised in the coalition agreement, but there are no concrete plans on how to implement this reform, then the government is less bound by the program than when all details of implementation are described.

<sup>13</sup> More than 95% of bills have been taken in Parliament for the Belgian and Dutch cases which lasted their entire duration, 85% for Dehaene we which fall after three years (85%), 75% for Berlusconi and 45% for Prodi I. source: Moury 2005.

## PROPORTION OF AGREEMENT-BASED DECISIONS

The second question concerns the possibility (or not) of ministers taking decisions other than those based on the coalition agreement. For this purpose we will calculate which proportion of laws proposed by the Council of Ministers to the Parliament is based on the coalition agreement<sup>14</sup>. The governmental decisions taken into account in our analysis are government bills, that is governmental decisions that would become law (or which would have a value superior to the law, such as a revision of the constitution). In consequence, we exclude implementing acts from our analysis (we.e. measures decided by the executive under the authority of the law). Using a ‘value of law’ criterion might introduce a bias into the research, because in some countries (e.g. in Italy) the law is commonly used even for routine decisions, contrary to Belgium, for example. In order to avoid this bias, we have decided not to include in our data base legislative decisions relating to routine decisions for the functioning of the state (such as the automatic renewal of a budget for an institution, etc.). Furthermore, we exclude from the bills studied all ratifications of international agreements. Scholars studying legislation commonly use this exclusion, because such ratifications are often of ‘high specificity and technicity but without any political value’, such as the agreement on the mercantile navy with Gabon, or on cinematographical co-production with New Zealand (Capano and Giulani 2003). Finally, we exclude bills implementing European directives, because ministers are obliged to implement them and they do not tell much about ministerial autonomy from party lines<sup>15</sup>.

It often occurs that a single bill includes several important decisions. A financial law is a clear example of a ‘mega-law’ where diverse decisions of considerable importance are taken. In that case, we divide the bill into its main parts, each of which is considered to be a decision. In order to identify the main points of the bill, we rely on summaries provided in the official reports from the Council of Ministers, which divide the major bills into their main points. All such decisions are available from the weekly reports of the Council of Ministers, which list all bills taken by the government and provide a summary of each of these bills. Such reports are available on the internet for the most recent legislatures, on CD ROM and in the governmental official review *Faits*.

Following the identification of the decisions to analyse, we will compare the governmental decisions to the list of real pledges of the coalition agreement (that is the pledges which are

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<sup>14</sup> We will not consider the laws that deal with the daily functioning of the state and the ratifications of international treaties. Moreover, ‘mega bills’ will be divided into their main points (each point is considered a decision).

<sup>15</sup> This coding was straightforward, as all governments studied explicitly signal in the report of the Council of Ministers when a bill was taken because of an European directive.



objectively testable), and check whether these decisions are based on these real pledges<sup>16</sup>. Looking only at testable pledges allows to make a link with the first measurement, but above all to increase the objectivity of the testing (and to prevent that any bill could be related to any vague point of the coalition agreement). Concretely, we would first check for each decision (all bills taken by the Council of Ministers), what was said about it in the coalition agreement. This data collection consisted therefore in a continuous process of looking at the bill, reading the chapter of the coalition agreement dealing with the point, and going back to the decision in order to assess whether it was based on the coalition agreement or not.

If the coalition agreement does not mention at all the policy field of the decision (for example, if a bill regulates the circulation of airplanes and the coalition agreement does not mention air regulation) then the decision is considered as not being based on the coalition agreement. This first selection, very clear-cut, has concerned approximately 40% of the governmental decisions studied. If, on the contrary, the coalition agreement mentioned the policy field of the governmental decision, we had to determine whether the decision was really based on the document or not. When a decision fully fulfilled a precise pledge (for example, when the coalition agreement mentioned the creation of a centre to promote the fight against aids and when such a centre was created), then undoubtedly the decision was considered as finding its origin in the coalition agreement. This concerned around 25% of the decisions. Finally, the most delicate selection task, concerning roughly one third of the decisions, has been to determine whether a governmental decision finds its origin in the coalition agreement, when the decision does not fulfil precise pledges but when the policy field to which the decision belongs is treated in the coalition agreement. For these decisions, it was sometimes necessary to read the law, or experts' comments on the law, in order to judge in the light of all this information whether the decisions concerned were based on real pledges of the coalition agreement or not. Of course, if a decision concerned a policy field mentioned in the coalition agreement, but contradicted what was written, we would not consider that this decision was based on the coalition agreement. On the contrary, a decision which only partially implements a pledge from the coalition agreement, which goes further than what was written in the coalition agreement, or precise actions taken to fulfil imprecise pledges will be considered as a decision which is based on the coalition agreement.

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<sup>16</sup> This decision to not consider rhetorical pledges as a potential basis of decisions is taken for two reasons: 1) to maintain continuity with the first dimension (which looks only at the fulfilment of real pledges) and 2) to obtain a more reliable system of classification between agreement-based and non agreement-based items (it is difficult to assess to what extent a decision is based on a rhetorical pledge, for example to assess if the decision 'constructing new game areas in poor suburbs' had its origins in 'reducing poverty').

**Table 3: Examples of decisions and their origin**

<b>Government and year of draft of coalition agreement</b>	<b>Governmental decisions</b>	<b>Origin</b>
Prodi I, 1996	Agreement to enlarge NATO	Agreement-based: agreement to enlarge NATO
Prodi I, 1996	Measure to avoid prisoner escapes	Non agreement-based (no mention of the decision in the coalition agreement)
Berlusconi II, 2001	Bill on 'devolution'	Bill divided into main decisions, half of which were agreement-based.
Berlusconi II, 2001	Law on legitimate suspicion	Non agreement-based (no mention of the decision in the coalition agreement)
Lubbers III, 1989	Measures on genetic manipulation	Agreement-based: measures regulating genetic manipulation

## TWO DIVERSE ROLE OF THE COALITION AGREEMENT: ELEMENTS OF EXPLANATION

As we can see in table 4, the two governments have transferred into governmental decisions at least half of their decisions. It is a remarkable result, which means that the coalition agreement is certainly not a ritual dance and deals with substantive policies. Moreover, considering that Prodi government lasted only two years, its degree of fulfilment (50%) is impressively high. Perhaps Prodi and ministers anticipated this short duration, and tried to adopt as many decisions based on the agreement as possible.

On the other hand, Berlusconi, who suffered from a worse economic conditions, whose ministers did not participate in the draft, and whose coalition agreement is much less precise, was also able to fulfil almost 60% of its pledges. It is thus remarkable that the score of fulfilment for the two governments is similar, nonetheless the many differences between the two governments. These ministers have one variable in common: in both case an important number of "important ministers" (Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Ministers) participated in the draft of the coalition agreement. Moreover, the fact that Berlusconi drafted himself most of the coalition agreement was a strong factor explaining a relatively high transfer, and Prodi as a drafter could not

count on the same effect. Indeed while the former derived his leadership from being the party leader of the main and the central party of the coalition, the former did not formally belong to any party and was not close to the bigger party.

Interestingly, we can also observe that precise pledges do not have a higher probability of being taken than imprecise ones. This contradicts Timmermans' expectations (which are not confirmed by his own results either) that implicit deals are more likely to be taken than explicit deals. As observed elsewhere, the differences between precise and imprecise pledges are the conflicts they involve: conflicts are more likely to happen over the fulfilment of imprecise pledges than of precise ones (see Timmermans and Moury 2006).

**Table 4: Pledges transferred into governmental decisions**

Cabinets	Precise pledges		Imprecise pledges		Total	
	Total	Fulfilled (%)	Total	Fulfilled (%)	Total	Fulfilled (%)
Prodi I (1996-98)	48	22 (45.8%)	226	134 (59.3%)	296	156 ( <b>50.0%</b> )
Berlusconi II (2001-2005)	61	36 (59.0%)	122	71 (58.2%)	183	107 ( <b>58.2%</b> )

In table 5, we see that at least 40% of the decisions are based on the coalition agreement. Again, this underlines the importance of the document. Interestingly, we see that there is a very important difference in the proportion of agreement based decisions (the proportion of agreement based decisions for Berlusconi's is half than for Prodi government).

The extremely higher proportion of non-agreement based decisions for Berlusconi than for Prodi is very surprising, also if we consider that both coalition agreement were relatively complete. Several variables may explain this variation: the fact that most ministers of the Berlusconi government did not participate in the negotiations and the presence of party leaders in the government. This is quite logical. If the government is composed by those who did not participate in the draft of the coalition agreement, they have more incentives to adopt non-agreement based decisions. The fact that government is composed by party leaders will also facilitate the adoption of non-agreement based decisions (less veto players).

**Table 5: Pledges transferred into governmental decisions**

Cabinets	Proportion of agreement-based decisions
Prodi I (1996-98)	72%
Berlusconi II (2001-2005)	40%

#### IV. Coalition Agreement and Adopted Legislation

In the previous section, we have looked at the role of the coalition agreement on ministers from different parties. In this section, we want to go along the decision-making chain and to focus on the importance of the coalition agreement for the Parliament (including opposition). Moreover, as we focus on all legislation above, we want to introduce the importance dimension. The main question here is what kind of legislative decisions coalition agreements may facilitate.

One might expect, for instance, that if coalition agreements are effective tools of both intra and inter party coordination, as we said, they should facilitate the promotion of *significant* legislative initiatives by the executive. To the extent, in fact, that with the coalition agreement an overall compromise has been reached on a number of *important*<sup>17</sup> policy issues, by the parties in the government, this should make easier for the executive to promote bills implementing this compromise: e.g., the executive's legislative proposals should encounter few vetoes from the majority parties. On the other hand, bills implementing government programmatic issues should have a more *conflictual* nature: i.e., they should divide sharply the majority and the opposition in parliament.

In the remainder of this paper, thus, we perform a brief individual level analysis (i.e., having government bills as unit of analysis) aiming at giving some support to the following two hypotheses, that:

1) Bills covering policy issues already mentioned in the coalition agreement (or, more in general, in the government programmatic declarations), are likely to be relatively more *significant* than bills covering policy matters that were not mentioned. And that 2) There is a positive relation between the programmatic nature of government bills and the their *degree of conflictuality*.

Note that differently from above, we distinguish significant from non significant one. Moreover, budget bills are excluded from the analysis (together with bills dealing with the ratification of international treaties and agreements). Before proceeding with the analysis, however,

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<sup>17</sup> Let us assume that the coalition agreement refers to the most important (at least for the government parties) policy issues

let us focus on two *critical* concepts that have been introduced here: the *importance* (or significance) and the (degree of) *conflictuality* of legislation.

## MEASURING IMPORTANCE AND CONFLICTUALITY OF LEGISLATION

### Importance of bills

Students of the legislative processes have regularly faced, or at least recognized, the problem of providing a distinction among laws, according to their degree of importance. A problem that is, above all, of etymological and conceptual nature: what does importance, when referred to laws, mean? The answer to such a question is neither immediate nor easy to provide: yet, perhaps, an univocal response does really exist. A law is important when its scope is relatively large; or, independently by its scope, a law is important when it is able to move the status quo; or, again, a law is important when it is perceived as such by political actors, that is, according to its symbolic character.

These are only some of the possible different answers one may find in the literature, according to the different theoretical and analytical approach adopted. Or, better: these are only some of the dimensions one could consider when aiming at building a measure of significance of legislation. Cameron (2000) is very explicit and effective in stressing the difficulties and ambiguities of such operation, when he notes how the “pathways to significance are so many and so varied that a tired but apropos phrase is irresistible: legislative significance is hard to define, but easy to recognize”<sup>18</sup>.

We have not the possibility here to enter into an in depth discussion on this regard, and to provide an overview of how the literature has defined and operationalized the concept of importance of legislation<sup>19</sup>. We can only point out directly our suggestion to consider the importance of legislative acts as a function of their *policy capacity*. With policy capacity we mean either the scope (in terms of ‘recipients’ or policies involved) of the legislation, or its capability of managing and innovating different aspects of specific, even sectional, policies. To some extent, thus, the concept of policy capacity holds together both the criteria of the *scope* of the legislation, preferred by some scholars such as Di Palma (1977). and that of the changing of the status-quo preferred by the rational choice scholars.

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<sup>18</sup> Among these pathways: “changing people’s lives, redistributing wealth, creating or destroying rights, limning partisan differences” (Cameron 2000:38).

<sup>19</sup> But see, for instance, Blondel 1970; Di Palma 1977; Mayhew 1991; Tsebelis 1999; Clinton & Lapinsky 2005

In trying to provide a reliable measure of significance of the legislative proposals promoted by the two executives under scrutiny here, we had to face the problem of choosing between an intensive and an extensive strategy: we had to choose whether to focus on few laws, assessing their scope and the policy innovation they provide, or, rather, extending the analysis to the universe of bills in our dataset. We have chosen the second option: which has meant, necessarily to find a more ‘immediate’ way to measure the degree of significance of each single bill.

In building such a measures we have relied on the classification of the projects of laws made by the Senate of the Republic, according to the *TESEO*<sup>20</sup> system. Very briefly, for each project of law the parliamentary secretariat provides a classification of the subject-matters covered by the bill as a whole and by each of the article of the same bill, according to a common thesaurus of terms, called TESEO system<sup>21</sup>. As a proxy of the policy capacity of any given bill (i.e. of the importance of this bill) we have used the number of different subject-matters the TESEO employed to classify it: the pretty intuitive assumption is that the number of subject matters is positively related to the *policy capacity* of a given bill: that is the broader the scope (in terms of sectors of civil society addressed or policies involved) of the bill, or the broader the set of policy details it includes, the larger will be the number of subject-matters classified by the TESEO system.

### Degree of conflictuality of government legislation

By conflictuality of a given bill we do not mean a *property* of the bill per se. In a sense we mean a *property* of the process of approval of the same bill. The concept of conflictuality, generally speaking, refers to the relation between majority and opposition in parliament; From this point of view, the degree of conflictuality of a given bill is a function of the support this bill receives in parliament from the opposition.

To compute the *score* of conflictuality for any given law promoted by the two executives under analysis, we have relied upon a huge set of data on the Italian legislation since 1987, collected under the supervision of professors Marco Giuliani and Francesco Zucchini at the university of Milan. Among numerous other things, this data set contains, for any given Italian law approved by the parliament since 1987, the exact number of contrary votes, abstentions and favourable votes, received by this bill from each single parliamentary group, in occasion of the final vote during the last reading of the bill at the Chamber of Deputies. We have taken this vote as reference: although it was not necessarily the final vote over a given bill. For any given bill we

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<sup>20</sup> ‘TEsauro SENato per l’Organizzazione dei documenti parlamentari’

<sup>21</sup> So, for instance, imagine a law on the protection of the environment: its subject-matters could be ‘water pollution’, ‘energy saving’, ‘industrial dirt’, ‘national parks’, and so forth and so on.

have firstly computed a *score of consensuality* as the percentage of all the *non contrary* votes (i.e., favourable votes plus abstention) cast by the opposition parties on the total of not contrary votes it received. We have then computed the *conflictuality score* that is, logically, equal to 100 minus the *consensuality score*<sup>22</sup>.

## PROGRAMMATIC NATURE AND IMPORTANCE OF GOVERNMENT BILLS

As written above, De Winter's have showned that the longer the coalition agreement, the more the bills adopted. We could speculate on the De Winter's reasoning, and formulate the hypothesis that bills dealing with issues mentioned in the government programmatic declarations (or *programmatic bills*) are generally more important than non programmatic bills. Figure 2, representing the relation between the programmatic nature of the bills promoted by the two governments under analysis here, and their level of importance, measured with the proxy of the number of subject-matters of the same bills, provides some empirical support to this general expectation.

### **Figure 1: Analysis of variance (independent samples T Test) of the number of bills subject-matters grouped for the variable "programme"**

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<sup>22</sup> Note that we have excluded from the computation all the ballots (both contrary and not contrary) cast by Deputies belonging to the Mixed group, for which it was not straightforward to us to know whether they also belong or not to parties supporting the executive.

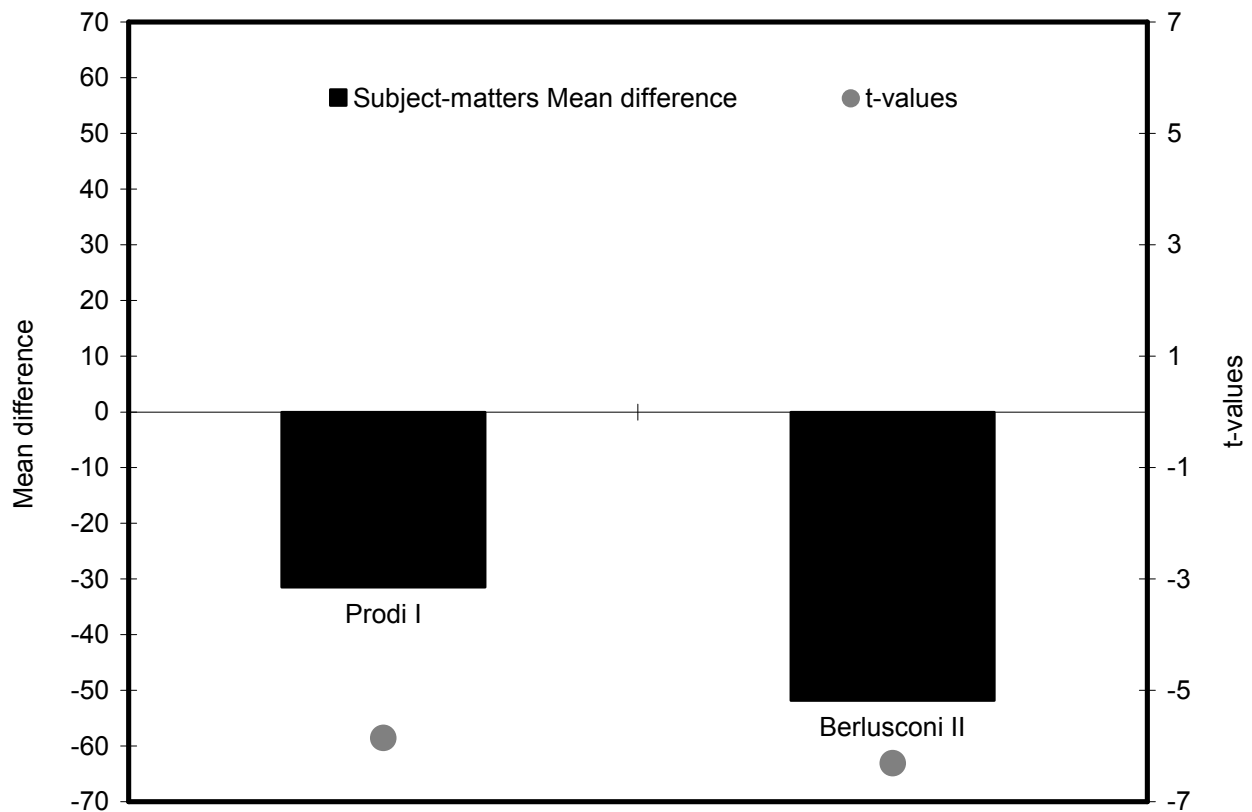


Figure 2, in fact, presents synthetically the results of a simple government-by-government independent-samples t-test of the variance of the number of subject-matters of the governmental legislative proposals, according to a grouping variable that takes values ‘1’ in case of programmatic bills and value ‘0’ in case of bills dealing with issues not mentioned in the coalition agreements/government programmatic declarations: the bars represent the difference of the mean, while the two grey circles, on the secondary y axis, indicate the t-values (both the two statistics are significant at the 0,001 level).

Although with some problems of heteroskedasticity<sup>23</sup>, and of low t-values, the test goes in the expected direction: with, thus, the average number of matters of *not programmatic* bills being lower than that of programmatic legislative proposals.

#### Programmatic nature and conflictuality of government bills

Programmatic bills are thus on average more important than non programmatic bills. Above, we have also hypothesized that programmatic bills are also characterized by a more conflictual pattern of approval in parliament. In other terms, we expect bills dealing with issues covered by the

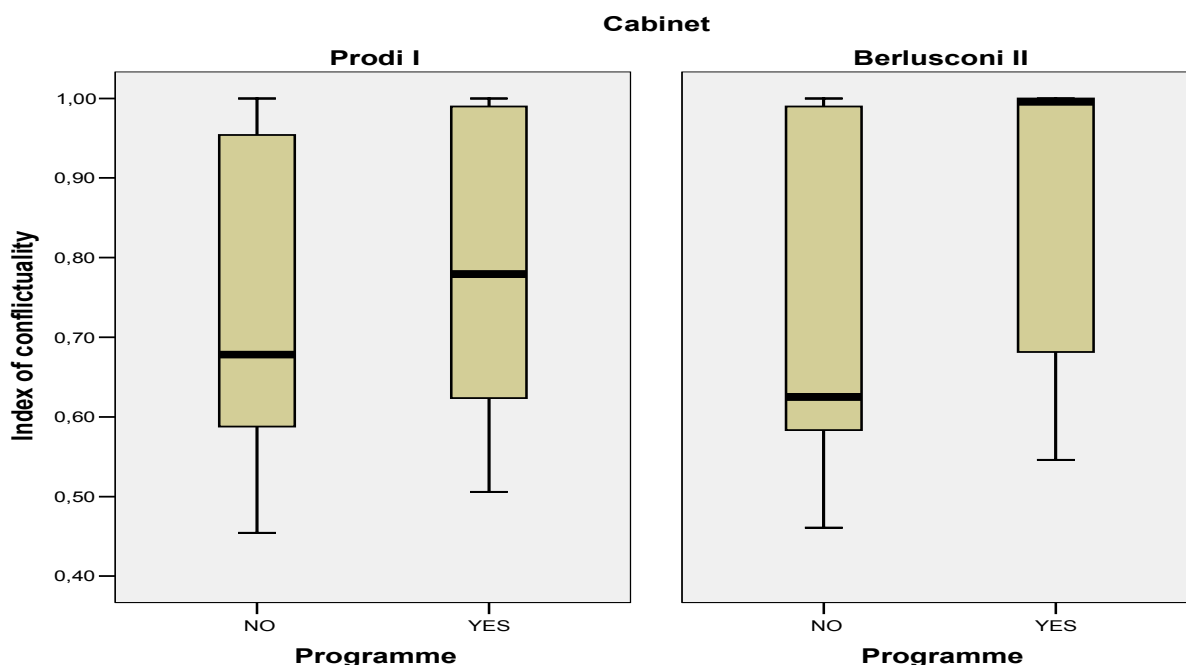
<sup>23</sup> Thus, equal variances are not assumed in the test.



coalition agreements/government declaration to receive relatively less support from the parliamentary opposition, than non programmatic bills.

In that we agree again with De Winter, that: “While on other bills the opposition may offer support depending on the bill’s inherent merits, it will tend to use all means to block, delay, amend or denounce government declaration bills at different stages of the legislative and post-legislative process, not only because it opposes the bills’ content, but also as a strategy to harass the government, and eventually bring it down” (De Winter 2004:43).

**Figure 3: Programmatic nature and conflictuality of government laws**



In figure 3 we present the distribution of the *scores of conflictuality* we have assigned to any given government laws (i.e., we are considering here only bills definitively approved by the parliament). Remember that, for any given bill, the score of conflictuality is computed as 100 minus the *consensuality score* (that is the percentage of all the *non contrary* votes cast by the opposition parties on the total of not contrary votes received by the same bill; Thus: the higher the score, the less the support given by the opposition to the law.

It is clear from the figure how by itself, the programmatic nature is not able to explain the conflictual or consensual nature of the government legislation: just have a look at the high

dispersion and the substantial overlapping between the distributions of programmatic and non programmatic laws. However, programmatic laws seem to be characterized, on average, by an higher degree of conflictuality: look, for instance, at the median value that is sensibly higher for programmatic laws than for non programmatic laws.

Interestingly, the difference between the conflictuality of programmatic and non programmatic laws seems to be more marked in the case of the Berlusconi II government. That is not surprising given the particular, and publicly exhibited<sup>24</sup>, commitment of the Berlusconi II cabinet, and in particular of its prime minister, toward the enactment of a number of specific policy announcements. Given that, therefore, it is likely, as hypothesized with De Winter, that opposition parties have tended to contrast more sharply the government programmatic legislation; one might say: in a more majoritarian and adversarial fashion of the political game.

## **Conclusion**

Coalition agreement are important for policy-making in Italy, even if coalition agreement are used since only recently, are drafted before the elections, and sometimes a long time before. These findings are in line with recent results, which show that the role of coalition agreement to increase stability is almost as important in Italy than in countries with a long tradition of drafting a coalition agreement such as Belgium and the Netherlands (Moury and Timmermans, article submitted for RISP).

First, we observed that government follows to an important extent the coalition agreement. This finding supports the view which sees the coalition agreement as an important determinant of policy-making, and shows that ministers in coalition are to some important extent constrained when deciding on policies. However, if ministers have to fulfil the coalition agreement, they will do it better if they have participated in its draft.

Moreover, the transfer of the program only tells one part of the extent to which ministers are bound by the coalition agreement: measuring the proportion of ministerial decision based on the coalition agreement is also significant. The results of this measurement enlighten once more the importance of the coalition agreement for ministers, as at least one third (and up to two thirds) of the governmental bills<sup>25</sup> originate in the coalition agreement. We observed much more variation on this second dimension. The participation of ministers in the draft, the wish of parties to govern together is important, but the absence of party leaders have perhaps also played an important role.

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<sup>24</sup> Just remember the “contratto con gli italiani”, signed by Berlusconi (at that time candidate of the Centre-Right coalition to the prime-ministerships) in 2001, during a popular tv show.

<sup>25</sup> With the exceptions cited earlier, we.e. ratification of international agreements, routine decisions and implementation of European directives.

This certainly explains why Prodi was able to fulfil half of its pledges in two years, while being much less able to adopt non-agreement based decisions. The fact that party leaders can possibly become ministers and that others eligible for ministerial posts are not it yet, the absence of an audience during the negotiations, the limited time, and the possibility of package deals enable party leaders to make deals more easily acceptable for their supporting base<sup>26</sup>. Taking non agreement-based decisions does not benefit from the same conditions as the making of policies based in the coalition agreement. In consequence, the veto of party leaders on these items is likely to be higher than on the agreement-based ones except, as we have seen before, when the party leaders enter the government.

One may reasonably expect that coalition agreements tackle with important policy issues: the most salient, at least, for the members of the government.

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<sup>26</sup> The three latter conditions identified by Peterson and al. in 1983 to explain easier intra-party decision-making.

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