

Europeanization and Italy

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1. Introduction*

"For many aspects, today, Italy is a «new Italy»" (Prodi 1999: 49). It is difficult to disagree with the former Italian Prime Minister, now president of the European Commission. "U-turn", "earthquake", "revolution", "metamorphosis", "new-season" are between the mostly used expressions to portray the radical changes that have taken place in this last decade. Whereas old stereotypes are certainly hard to die, when new ones begin to appear¹, this probably indicates that some real transformations have already happened.

Let's make a quick checklist (Vesperini 1998):

- the party system has now little to do with its traditional image of immobilist polarized pluralism;
- old political conventions have been completely upset;
- electoral laws - from the municipal to the national level - have been reformed in a majoritarian direction;
- almost the whole political élite has been replaced;
- there has been a gradual reorganization of the governmental structure, both in vertical and horizontal terms;
- new or revised procedures have altered the relationship between the executive and the parliament in the law-making process;
- decentralization and federalization are now more than empty catchwords;
- the introduction of independent authorities and a clearer distinction between political and administrative responsibilities has modified some of the traditional attributes of the bureaucracy;
- privatization and liberalization have begun to affect the so-called economic constitution of the country;
- substantive policy reforms have been introduced in crucial sectors of public intervention such as welfare;
- an extraordinary recovery in the public accounts permitted to enter in the Monetary Union with the first wave of countries

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¹ See, for example, Economist (1999)

Europe is widely quoted as one major factor behind all this. On one side, the "European model" - whatever this means - has inspired the introduced reforms. On the other, the factual and cognitive constraints set by the European Union have favored - if not indirectly compelled - many of these transformations.

The "funny" thing is that the "europeanization" of Italy is normally considered both an element and a cause of the new framework: Italy is more European due to the increasing EU integration and, at the same time, is more integrated due to its renewed European attitude. To be sure, the unclear distinction between what has to be considered exogenous and what is endogenously controlled - or between independent and dependent variables - is not peculiar to Europe. The same applies to several supposed causes: the kickback city scandals have certainly undermined the political élite, but the investigations were so effective because parties were already unstable; the fiscal crisis demanded a sound budgetary policy, but the executive chose to put the fulfillment of Emu's requirements as its priority; the electoral law firstly applied in 1994 seem to represent the watershed of the new Italy, but many reforms were introduced earlier whereas the new electoral system has not produced the expected results in terms of party reduction, etc.

From a methodological standpoint, acknowledging the extent of the variation is not sufficient for identifying the cause. "Post hoc, propter hoc": ... but too many things happened at the same time, and to disentangle the role of single variables - EU constraints (Dyson and Featherstone 1996), the new internal institutional settlement (Fabbrini 1998), the globalization of the economy (Regini 1999), the mass disaffection (Morlino and Tarchi 1996), etc. - is not an easy exercise.

In this paper, we will pursue the following line of reasoning. In the next paragraph we will contrast two different meanings of the concept of "europeanization": the one that can be found in the specialized literature of political science, and the one that prevails in the political debate in Italy. Bearing in mind this double interpretation, the core of the paper is devoted to an empirical investigation of the clues of europeanization we can find in Italy. This exploration will be conducted starting at the polity/institutional level, and then continue at the policy/cognitive one. After this empirical and analytical journey, we hope to be better equipped for understanding the crucial relationship between the "new Europe" which emerged from Maastricht and Amsterdam and the "new Italy" outlined by Prodi.

2. Europeanization/normalization

Literally, "europeanization" indicates the fact that national features give way to a common supranational character: in different domains we should make out the fading of the firsts, and the gradual appearance of the latter. As Schmidt (1997a) puts it: "[a]ll member-states are now enmeshed [...] in a European politico-administrative system that turns national political officials into European decision-makers, national administrations into implementers of European decisions, and nationally organized interests into European lobbies". It is beyond the aim of this paper to review the many variations in the use of this concept², but a few general notes will be functional to our argument.

In the political science literature, europeanization is normally declined in four ways: institutions, political dynamics, cultures and policies – variedly combined – are the major targets of the shift in governance which is affecting the political systems of Europe.

Whereas it is hard to imagine that the EU influence reaches the fundamental structures of power inside the nation state – directly modifying its party system, form of government or electoral system – the actual functioning of the European democracies (i.e. the balance between those powers) has been certainly affected (Schmidt 1997b). This does not necessarily imply a high level of institutional homogeneity, since national "institutional spheres are affected differently and they are likely to attend to, interpret and respond to European developments differently and in non-synchronized ways" (Olsen 1995: 34).

Rometsch and Wessels (1996) take the EU challenge seriously, looking for an improbable institutional "fusion" of the political structures formally involved in the national-EU relationships, but the empirical evidence shows little convergence at this level. A more promising approach is the one chosen by Caporaso, Cowles and Risse (1998: 1), which, exploring the goodness of fit between EU and domestic structures, explicitly referred themselves to "formal and informal norms, rules, regulations, procedures and practices".

² For a recent in-depth review of the different approaches, see Morisi and Morlino (1999).

Another way of looking at the same phenomenon is to refer to the dynamics which take place in the European wide multi-level system of governance (Hooge 1996). In this perspective, the same dichotomy domestic-supranational loses much of its interest: public and private actors interact "freely" in non-hierarchical and non-market webs, posing entirely new problems of political steering (Mayntz 1998). The same structure of opportunity modifies their behavior, extending their capacity of cooperating and conflicting, of using their exit and voice options, or of loyally defending some form of boundary.

Thirdly, europeanization may be approached from a cultural side. Though political cultures do not change from the day to the night, the history of the European community now approaches half a century, so that it is possible to conceive the slowly penetration and diffusion of a set of European values and identities. After all, in certain circumstances, lay people and élites are less subject to inertial phenomena than institutions. To the same conceptual universe pertains the issue of the legitimizing arguments – the public discourse (Schmidt 1998) – used by the European governments in order to assure the necessary collective support to the integration project.

Finally, fulfilling the original ambition of its founding fathers and Delors' prophecy, the EU spreads its influence upon national policies. "In fact, European integration is at its very core an endeavor of transforming or harmonizing member states policies" (Conzelmann 1998: 1). International jurists are certainly at ease with the direct authority exercised by the Union with its regulations and directives, as well as with the increasing role exercised by the European Court of Justice (Stone Sweet and Brunell 1998). Data regarding transposition effectiveness or infringement procedures are certainly important benchmarks in order to evaluate the actual degree of europeanization, but policy analysts often prefer to go beyond the formal framework in order to assess how the context, the content, the processes and the outcomes of the domestic policy-making has changed due to the EU membership (Andersen and Eliassen 1993). In other words, policy change may occur even in areas that are (still) not among the direct competencies of the EU. The modified environment alters the "preferences, alliances, strategies [... and] the range of ideas available to policy-makers" (Borrás, Font and Gómez 1998: 27), thus producing

convergence through a sort of spill-over effect (Leonardi 1995; Morisi and Morlino 1999).

In the next pages we will implicitly refer to all these different meanings of the concept of europeanization in order to evaluate the Italian case, but before turning to this empirical assessment we have to note that the common use of this same term in the domestic political debate normally transcend the arguments hereto presented³.

In the rhetoric of political disputes, concepts have not to be neatly presented, but it is clear that in the transition phase which Italy is experiencing since the early '90s, europeanization mostly meant "normalization". The "new Italy" has to be more European, in the sense of loosing its eccentric, extraordinary, astonishing and unique features which has certainly fascinated quite a few Italianists but probably not many Italians.

The quest for normality takes mainly two different roads. On one side we can find the idealization of foreign experiences, especially regarding the supposed effects of their institutional setting. In this case, a generic reference to the working of the "major European democracies" is enough to support very different projects: from the reform of the electoral system to the introduction of a (semi-) presidential government, etc. In this perspective, the variety of possible "models" doesn't seem to represent a problem: it is the *a quo* term that matters (the pressures for reforming the present institutional system), not the *ad quam* (the potentially imported setting). The European Union bears no responsibility for this kind of xenophilia, if not for the fact that it amplifies the contiguity between nations and induces the comparisons.

The second path taken in the political debate by the idea of "europeanization as normalization", is the claim for a new role of the country on the international (especially European) scene. As a matter of fact, Italy has long been considered an awkward partner (Sbragia 1992). The governmental instability hindered the credibility of its political élite, both in the domestic and in the international arena, so that the simple fact of "surviving without governing" (Di Palma 1977) has often been regarded as part of the Italian miracle. Accordingly, Italy has always played a minor role in its

³ The lack of a tradition of Italian political science studies on these topics (Giuliani e Radaelli 1999) is probably among the causes of the discrepancy between theoretical and political debate

external relations, with a foreign policy whose subordinate character appeared in the major critical circumstances as well as in the many micro-decisions⁴.

Though with irregular successes, recovering an international political standing and autonomy consistent with their belonging to the élitist club of the G-7 has become a priority for the governments of the '90s. The stubborn run after the EMU requirements has probably many origins, but it is one of the most evident exercise (and success) of Italy's strategy and aspiration in the international arena. In this field, the globalization of governance does not leave many alternatives to big countries like Italy. As Giuliano Amato once lively said: "[B]ehind the corner there isn't simply the exit from [the core of] Europe, the shelter in an impossible autarchy, but the danger of becoming a Disneyland at its service" (Pesole 1994: 170)⁵.

The europeanization of Italy certainly goes through this wider process of gaining an international credibility: the acquisition of a greater confidence from behalf of the major public and private financial organizations (e.g. IMF or Moody's), the pursuit of autonomous strategies in case of international crisis (e.g. Lebanon or Kosovo), the conception of independent alliances in the diplomatic relations (e.g. regarding the reform of the Security Council of the UN), the promotion of Italian experts and politicians at the direction of crucial international organizations (e.g. Masera at the EIB, Ruggiero at the WTO, I. Visco at the Economic Department of the OECD, Prodi at the EU Commission), etc. It is somehow curious, but revealing, that while the EU experiences at its core some of the most deplorable features of Italian politics – such as the anticipated resignation of its executive (the Commission) due to corruption and financial scandals – the Italian representatives are generally appreciated for their work in that same institution⁶.

As we will try to argue in the next pages, as far as Italy is concerned, the "theoretical" and "political" declinations of the concept of europeanization seem to

⁴ There are certainly notable exceptions to this general rule – e.g. the first enforcement of the majority rule in the European Council of Milan that opened the way to the SEA - but they can't contradict the overall picture of a political system unable to play according to its international economic rank.

⁵ Much in the same vein, though with different arguments (Panebianco 1991) suggested the absence of any alternative scenario to the full belonging to the European world, and Cotta (1998) stressed the compelled commitment to this project using (and stretching) Hirschman's category of "loyalty".

⁶ I'm referring myself especially to the two Italian Commissioners – Monti and Bonino – but even to the team of experts guided by Padoa Schioppa at the ECB responsible for the transition to the Euro.

share a common destiny. In both cases, changes at the highest and most visible level – a formal restructuring of the executive, renewed institutions and procedures to govern the relationships with the EU, a neat improvement in the implementation of EU directives or decrease in the number of infringement proceedings, the unambiguous adoption of a definite “model of democracy”, the simplification of the party system, etc.- have been rare. In this context, the more positive record achieved in less palpable spheres – the public consciousness of the potential drawbacks of easy-spending policies, the redefinition of crucial policy networks, the kind of discourse that governs the selection of ideas for policy-making in several sectors, the professional behavior of members of the “new” politico-administrative élite – could be insufficient. For many observers, the gap between “hard” and “soft” reforms demonstrates the poor consolidation of the new Italy portrayed by Prodi, thus suggesting a tame europeanization of the country (Verzichelli 1998, Fabbrini 1998, Pasquino 1999, Ferrera and Gualmini 1999). I would be more optimistic. Informal mechanisms, practices, dynamics and discourses – the kind of factors on which new institutionalists have reoriented their attention, and seem to be central in the comprehension of the effects of Europe on Italy- may guarantee sufficient stability to the achieved progress. But we will return to this point in the conclusions.

3. Domains of europeanization

One of the recurrent observations regarding Italy's EU membership is that its political system is ill-suited for the Union. Leaving aside those political factors that have contributed to its well-known “originality”, there are many features that clash with the typical Brussels' dynamics and its institutional framework. The incomplete decentralization of the responsibilities left the regions in a limbo of duties without representation. The absence of ministerial coordination produced incomprehension and political tensions. Complex law-making procedures slowed the adaptation to the *acquis communautaire*, without increasing its internal democratic scrutiny. The juridical tradition conflicted with the flexibility of the EU approach, while the inefficient domestic bureaucracy hardly coped with Brussels' technocrats. The closed emergencial policy style failed to adapt itself to the open problem-solving ambitions

of the EU, reducing the anticipation capabilities of the Italian representatives⁷. There is no member state that adjusted itself to the new EU framework without problems (Mény, Muller and Quermonne 1996), but many observers agree that Italy's integration turned to be particularly problematic.

Bearing in mind the distinctions suggested in the preceding paragraph, I will try to revise this general picture, in order to assess its eventual modification. As the introductory remarks of the paper reminded us, too many "constant" features of Italy changed in a short time span. Even if this analysis confirms the null hypothesis – no change derives from the EU membership – it will not have been a useless exercise. For the sake of simplicity I will trace a rough line between politics and policy domains, and then explore in greater detail how both these arenas have been affected by the EU membership. In each case, I will advance a tentative hypothesis regarding the presumed effect of europeanization in the specific field, and then discuss (i.e. validate or falsificate) it empirically.

3.1 Politics

A first distinction within the politics domain can be drawn between changes affecting the internal distribution of power (A.1 to A.4), and variations regarding Italy's external relationships (B.1 to B.3). In the first case we are mainly interested at party dynamics, at the confrontation between legislative and executive powers, at the internal control of the public administration and at center-periphery relationships. In the second one we refer ourselves to the link between the government in Rome and the work of its representatives in Brussels and Strasbourg, and to the specialized institutions which work on EU affairs both in the parliament and in the executive.

Hypothesis A.1 Party dynamics have been moderated and re-oriented

If labels do teach something regarding a political system, the Italian democracy has certainly received its fundamental imprinting from its party system. None of the institutional reforms introduced in this last decade to modify its essential features derive from the EU membership, though they have been all normatively legitimized

⁷ For a closer investigation of these dynamics, see for example Giuliani (1996). In a comparative perspective Schmidt (1997b) extends the analysis to political cultures and to the process of interest

with reference to a hypothetical European standard⁸. In this confrontational environment, Europe has seldom represented a contested issue. Since the communist critics to the EMS, more than twenty years of full bipartisanship have passed. Party platforms continuously register the convergence of every party – from the “Democratici di Sinistra” to “Alleanza Nazionale” – on the full integration of Italy in Europe⁹

As Pasquino (1999) underlines, party élites found their convenience in superficially aligning themselves according to the prevailing euro-enthusiasm of the population. Its positive attitude may well be the plain result of misinformation (Eurispes 1993), or the ultimate hope of skeptic citizens (Martinotti e Stefanizzi 1995), but it has long represented a relevant political resource. The absence of dissenting voices discouraged any real evaluation of the EU, which constantly remained outside the hottest internal political debates (Giuliani 1999). Even in the occasion of European elections, Meps candidates usually pay lip service to EU issues, in order to return rapidly to more divisive topics.

Paradoxically, people have demonstrated to discriminate more than parties. In fact, in the last few years there has been a gradual reorientation in the political preferences of citizens towards the Union. Until the '70s, the most enthusiastic supporters were mainly center or right winged citizens; clearly, the original anti-EC stance of the communist party influenced the attitudes of its electorate. The '80s and the first half of the '90s represented the apex of bipartisanship; political orientation had almost no influence upon the public perception of the EU. The last years have witnessed the inversion of the original relationship, and Europe has gradually become a positive value among left and center-left voters. Viceversa, center-right and right winged citizens – like elsewhere in Europe – begin to share a critical disposition towards the Community institutions (Biorcio 1998). This risks to remain the only relevant reorientation in party dynamics around the European issue.

intermediation, though her macro-approach exceedingly extends the validity of some stereotypes.

⁸ After all, since the beginning of the 5th Republic in France, Italy remained the unique western representative of centrifugal democracies in Lijphart's original typology (1968).

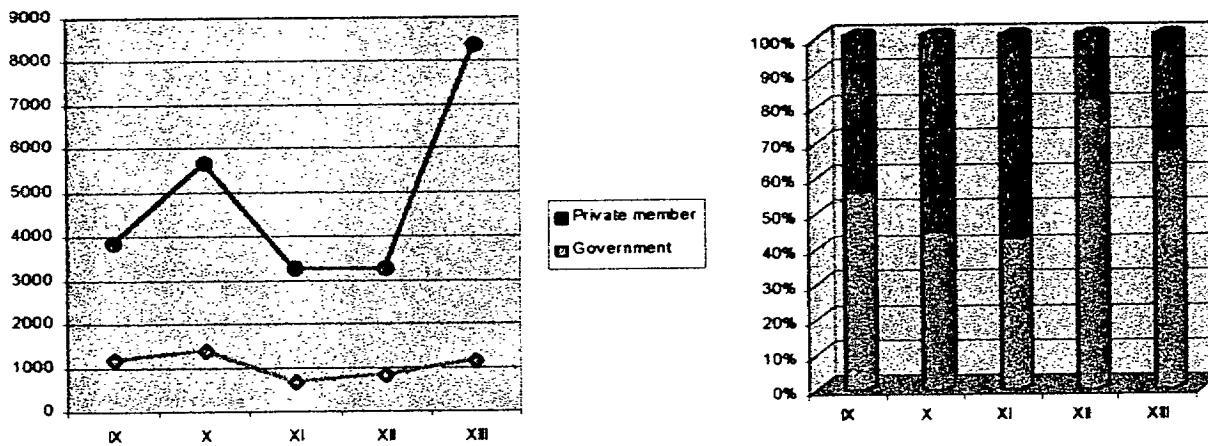
⁹ The electoral platform of “Rifondazione comunista” in 1996 deplored the absence of a labour/social dimension in the EU projects, and not the monetary union *per se*.

Hypothesis A.2 The executive has strengthened its autonomy vis à vis the legislative, and has become more hierarchically organized

Internal reformers have pursued both transformations at the highest institutional level¹⁰. The europeanization process has probably given new weapons to their arguments, since enjoying sufficient degrees of freedom is commonly recognized as a prerequisite for an effective action in Brussels. Nonetheless, the attainment of a concrete progress along these dimensions is ambiguous, and its attribution to European factors is even more questionable.

We will return later on the specific instruments used by the governments to cope with its EU obligations. Here we will remain at a more general level. Parliamentary procedures do not assign outstanding legislative powers to the Italian executive¹¹. Private member bills largely outnumber the amount of governmental projects, and though their approval rate is obviously lower, they still represent a consistent share of the aggregate of approved bills (see Fig. 1).

Fig. 1 Bills presented and share of the total amount of approved bills



Source: Own elaboration on data from *Compendio statistico dalla I alla XII legislatura*, and *Camera dei Deputati database*, updated at the 23.5.1999 for the XIII legislature

¹⁰ I'm referring myself to the special Bicameral committee to revise the Italian constitution

¹¹ We can't enter here in details. In English, see the recent Della Sala (1998).

Data reported in figure 1 confirm the dispersion of powers among institutions which has characterized the Italian law-making since the beginning, and largely contradict the strengthening of the executive. Exceptions are due to the transitional situation which has characterized the 12th legislature, and can be primarily imputed to the extensive use by the governments of temporary decrees. These instruments – recently severely limited by the Constitutional Court – lose their power after a two-month period, unless the Assembly adopts them. Many of them usually expire, but the few that are turned into law have to surrender themselves to the amendments introduced in the Parliament (De Micheli 1997). In this sense, it is difficult to argue that the institutional autonomy formally held by the executive in its EU bargaining, spilled over into the internal law-making arena¹².

There is a second type of instruments potentially used by the executive. The absence of administrative reserve – that is a constitutionally defined domain subject to direct regulations – compel governments to play the difficult legislative game “against” the parliament. But – through the usual channels – they can ask for the delegation of specific powers. In this way they obtain the formal authority to intervene with a larger autonomy in different sectors. This opportunity – whose employment was initially introduced thanks to the so-called “*Leggi comunitarie*” (cfr. infra) – has been used quite extensively in the last years. Beside the implementation of EU directives, two major fields have been characterized by this procedure. On one side the delegation of legislative jurisdiction has been employed to force the smoother introduction of far-reaching reform projects: from pension policies to decentralization and administrative reforms, from labor to health policies. In each case these were the typical structural actions which the European Commission and the IMF repeatedly asked for. On the other, governments have increasingly introduced simplification and delegification measures according to the EU SLIM project¹³.

¹² Whose unchanged consensual attitude (Giuliani 1997) represented a further element against the government.

¹³ There have been 3 delegations for simplification in the 10th legislature (1987-92), 8 in the 11th (1992-94), 8 in the 12th (1994-96) and already 35 in the first two years of the 13th legislature (1996-98).

As far as the internal organization of the executive is concerned, the typical collegial style of government has not been deeply modified, and the Italian premiers still have the problem of controlling the dissenting voices inside their government. Formal and informal efforts of strengthening their relative position have been tried since the early '80s, but they have not been particularly effective. Since the executive led by Amato (1992-93), the leadership of premiers has been only moderately contested by other ministers. Their technical character or electoral investiture, combined with the crisis of the party system, tend to consolidate their authority inside the government (Fabbrini 2000). Nonetheless, no Italian chief executive was afforded even half of the prominence enjoyed by the British Prime Minister or German chancellor. Europe had no influence on this, and even if the current prime minister – D'Alema – tries to strengthen his personal leadership through a resolute use of the media⁴, the comparative gap remains wide.

Hypothesis A.3 Technical bodies have increased their role inside the public administration

The Italian public administration is known for its poor performance. The economic and social costs of its ineffectiveness are widely reckoned. Whereas the participation of Italian bureaucrats in EU affairs has not modified their deeply-rooted attitudes, there have been a few indirect effects of europeanization.

First of all, the former minister for the civil service – Bassanini – tried to use the familiar logic of the “vincolo esterno” to force the internal adaptation of the Italian administration to international standards of performance. He proposed to his European colleagues the adoption of a sort of “administrative Maastricht”, with the fulfillment of tangible bureaucratic requisites at precise deadlines. At the same time

See <http://www.camera.it/primapagina/primapagina/files/raffronti.doc>, *Rapporto sull'attività legislativa nel 1998*; see even different chapters in Vesperini (1998).

⁴ The weekly journal “L'Espresso” has made a comparison of the number of interviews given by Prime Ministers in Europe. D'Alema has both the highest number of “contacts” with the media, and the larger variety of issues addressed.

he advanced in four steps a comprehensive set of improvements which try to emulate the most successful European experiences in administrative reform¹⁵. Both projects will face severe implementation problems for very different reasons – the mostly symbolic nature of the first, and the far-reaching character of the second – but, at the same time, they both clearly reveal the end of the autarchic approach to administrative problems for Italy.

Secondly, the increased familiarity with foreign and EU experiences brought the introduction of yet unknown technical structures inside the Italian public administration. I'm referring myself mainly to the extensive introduction of independent authorities, which began in 1990 with the adoption of an anti-trust law explicitly modeled upon the corresponding EU authority just inaugurated. Thereafter independent technical bodies have been replicated in several sectors: telecommunications, energy, privacy, bank control, etc. (Morisi 1997)

Finally, and more informally, Prodi and D'Alema have somehow institutionalized the habit of establishing specific expert committees and fora in crucial reform sectors such as welfare, macro-economic adjustment, labor policy, poverty, etc. These committees - which have only consultation powers but do pragmatically influence the governmental policy activity - are mainly composed by university professors and think tanks experts traditionally open to European and international experiences. Their increasing contribution in the selection of "ideas" capable of becoming "solutions", represent a further channel of indirect europeanization of the public machinery.

Hypothesis A.4 Regions are gaining an autonomous role in EU affairs

Regions have law-making jurisdiction and autonomy on specific topics: environment, health, etc. It should have been sufficient to allow them the possibility of self-representing their needs and preferences at the European level, but the Italian Constitution retain every activity of foreign representation to central institutions, namely to the government. This severe obstacle has long hindered their capacity to

¹⁵ See Capano (2000) for a comprehensive analysis

play directly at the Brussels' level, thus reducing even their local performances on issues tackled by EU policies (such as structural funds)

The transformation of the regional system into a federal state entered the political agenda already in the early '90s with the electoral successes of the *Lega Nord*, but it acquired relevance in the governmental agenda only with the executive led by Prodi. In the last five years have been introduced more than 200 norms and regulations that decentralized functions and competencies to local levels of government: almost half of them regarded regional powers, including the introduction of a larger (albeit still marginal) fiscal autonomy (Vesperini 1998). This policy somehow conforms to the idea of "Europe of the regions" – though regional governments have seen their external powers only marginally modified – but its inspiration has to be looked for in internal events such as the success of autonomist parties and the growing discontent towards the central government.

Hypothesis B.1 There has been a reorganization of ministerial competencies around European issues

Two processes could indicate a formal restructuring of the competencies due to the europeanization process: on one side the powerful institutionalization of an ad hoc Minister for EU affairs and, on the other, a complete reorganization of the competencies modeled upon the works of the European Council(s) of Ministers. None of the two have been realized.

First of all, the number of senior and junior ministers, as well as the assignment of their portfolios, still depends on a complex balance between the parties (and factions) which support the government. Only the entirely technical executive led by Dini drastically reduced the number of senior and junior positions available (19+31), whereas D'Alema – leading a seven-party government - has appointed the highest

number of ministers (35 senior + 73 junior). In this context a comprehensive revision of the competencies is out of question¹⁶

Secondly, regarding the ad hoc ministry for EU policies, its authority is still unsettled. On one side it has always been exposed to the competition of the powerful economic department of the ministry for foreign affairs. On the other, its status and autonomy changed from time to time, and Prodi even abolished it before being compelled to assign its competencies to a junior minister of the Foreign office (Giuliani 1999). The formal reintroduction of a senior position in the current executive has not (yet) produced radical changes, with the new Minister often confined in the "second-rank lines" of the government. In a parliamentary debate, an MP of the committee specialized in EU policies polemically addressed the executive wishing that "the new Minister will hopefully be able to coordinate the other members of the government [...], because they often give precedence to matters which are different from the problems of EU norms and regulations"¹⁷.

Hypothesis B.2 There has been a reorganization of parliamentary competencies around European issues

The Union is mainly an arena for executives. The relative weight of the European parliament is growing, but (generally speaking) that of national parliaments is not. The more Brussels acquires an active role, the less Mps are able to verify the accountability of their national representatives involved in EU policy-making. Each parliament has established institutions and procedures to bridge the national democratic deficit implied by the multi-level governance: Italy is certainly not an exception in that regards.

¹⁶ Actually there have been several projects in that direction. Recently, Bassanini proposed a reorganization of the executive based upon 9 ministers only, but the only ministerial fusion already accomplished regarded the treasury and budgetary departments.

¹⁷ "Seduta n. 472 del 27.1.1999", Dichiarazioni di voto finale sul disegno di legge della Legge comunitaria 1998", Camera dei deputati C 5459.

Whereas the Senate has long established its own *ad hoc* committee for European Affairs (*Giunta per gli affari europei*), the low chamber introduced a special committee for EU policies only in 1990, and transformed it in a permanent committee in 1996. The change in denomination is not merely symbolic. Until the XII legislature, the committee had mainly to coordinate the parliamentary examination of the *Legge comunitaria* (the “annual” Community law for the cumulative transposition of EU directives; *cfr. infra*). Currently it has a sort of super-ordinate status (almost like the one enjoyed by the budgetary and constitutional committee), since it has to review all the bills under discussion in order to ascertain their “EU congruity”.

Both committees (and chambers) are saturated by the formal competencies connected to the descending phase of the EU policy-making, and lament their impossibility of influencing the ascending one¹⁸. Every six months, through an official report, the government had to inform the parliament of its record and projects in EU affairs. Besides having mostly been a symbolic and useless account, at the beginning of 1999 the government succeeded to approve an article in the Community law for 1998 that transformed that report in an annual appointment. Several MPs protested that the government “wanted to reduce the controlling powers of the Parliament”¹⁹, but that did not modify the outcome of the vote. The often-requested special parliamentary session devoted to EU policies may increase the formal efficiency of the descending phase, but it doubtfully can improve the democratic accountability of the executive in these matters²⁰.

Hypothesis B.3 Politico-administrative élites have changed their European attitude
Italian élites have never been against Europe or the integration process. They may have cultivated “third ways” in foreign policy, but without conceiving them as real alternatives to the “European adventure” (Padoa Schioppa 1998). Nonetheless –

¹⁸ See the “*Relazione della XIV Commissione permanente sul disegno di legge della Legge Comunitaria 1999*”, Camera dei deputati, N. 5619-A.

¹⁹ See footnote 17.

²⁰ For a different opinion see Pasquino (1999).

with the usual notable exceptions – politicians and top civil servants have never been particularly fond of Europe. The European parliament has been often conceived as the retirement gold mine for decadent politicians, or the first political training for inexperienced outsiders. Italy has always deplored its second-rank role in the European Commission, without recognizing that it lacked competent top civil servants wishing to permanently invest their professional lives in Brussels' Babel. Members of the government seemed to prefer the heated atmosphere of internal partisan quarrels to the pragmatic style of EU councils.

The highest position in the EU Commission wasn't worth a second-rank Minister in the national government, national elections were a sufficient stimulus even for a Commissioner, and a rarified presence in Strasbourg was the unavoidable side-effect of double mandates. There are tiny signals that something is changing. First of all, the simple awareness of the persistent role of the European Union in internal matters has grown considerably. A few years ago, lay-people, entrepreneurs, civil servants and even MPs still failed to recognize the systematic influence of the EU in the domestic arena (Radaelli 1988, Censis 1989). Secondly, the two Commissioners chosen in 1994 by the government led by Berlusconi convinced insiders and policy-takers for their competencies. Thirdly, strategic offices in crucial policy sectors are now covered by Italian officers, and there is a growing rotation of top jobs among internal private and public sectors, research centers and EU appointments. Finally, albeit still cautiously, politicians are beginning to choose Brussels instead of Rome: Bonino preferred to remain Commissioner than to enter the executive led by D'Alema (though she has been a bottom-up candidate for the Presidency of the Italian Republic, and now leads a party list for the European elections), and Prodi - not without hesitations - chose not to guide the new Democratic party in order to take indisputably the leadership of the EU Commission.

3.1 Policy

In this paragraph we will synthetically review the major changes that have affected the internal policy-making dynamics. An in-depth survey is beyond our aims, since we should have examined different sectors and/or different types of policy (Borrás, Font and Gómez 1998). We will schematically organize our investigation around two main topics. First of all, we will analyze the procedures adopted in order to cope with EU obligations. Simple quantitative comparisons will allow us to assess the actual working of these procedures (C.1). Secondly, we will pay attention to some qualitative features of the main policy reforms discussed and adopted in the last few years – content, involved actors, underpinning ideas, etc (C.2).

Hypothesis C.1 There has been a gradual convergence towards the normative performance of the main EU partners

Italy is known for its delayed and reactive EU policy-making. Compared to that of the major European member states – those who should represent the benchmark as for policy influence and activism – Italy has long been passive in the ascending phase and reluctant in the descending one (Italy 1996). In order to cope with a normative burden which increased from year to year, and respond to the intensifying scrutiny of the European Commission and sharpening “attention” of the Court of Justice, Italy chose to introduce a radical innovation in its internal procedures for the ratification of EU directives: the so-called *Legge Comunitaria* (Annual Community law).

After a decade from its first introduction, we can now evaluate its success in reducing the normative gap. With the *Legge Comunitaria*, the government commits itself to submit every year a bill for the cumulative transposition of all the unsatisfied obligations. Unfortunately, some technical shortcomings of the instrument itself, combined with the endemic instability of the political system, hampered the conceived automatism and produced a few perverse political effects²¹.

²¹ For these technicalities see Giuliani (1999). Anyway we have to underline that neither the parliamentary procedures (i.e. the *navette* system), nor harsh political conflicts have delayed the

Instead of looking at the overall amount of European directives dealt with the Annual law – which by no means represents the number of EU norms introduced in the Italian body of laws – we will consider its outcome directly comparing the data published by the European Commission.

The most general indicator is the quota of due directives actually transposed. Since 1992 - but the earlier standings were even worse – Italy has always remained among the last three member states as for incorporation of EU directives. Since the enlargement of the Union it lagged in the last two positions without filling the gap neither to the best performers, nor to the average new member states²². Further data show that the other member states often “choose” not to respect the deadlines of EU directives. They may strategically delay their incorporation in order to favor (or not displease) national interests, or to take advantage from their free riders status. A comparative analysis indicates for those countries a great variation in the rate of transposition both diachronically and through different sectors. Italy's incapacity is more evenly distributed, indicating a likely lack of strategy behind its figures.

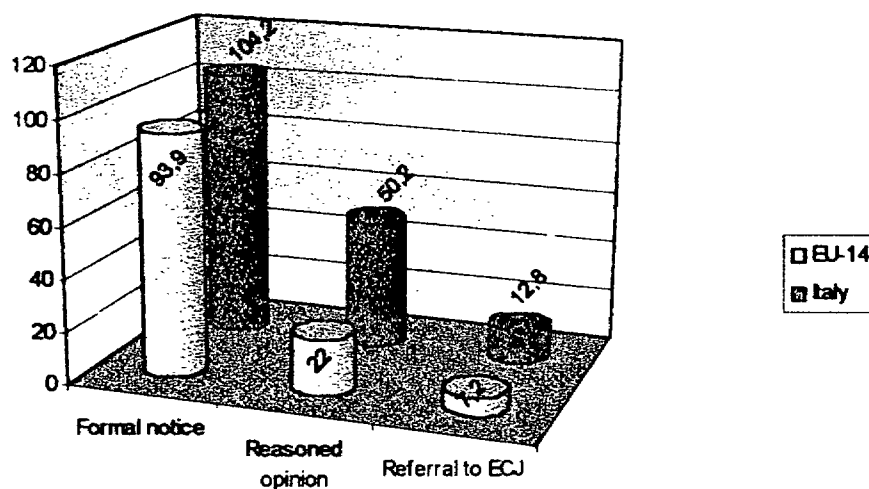
A second indicator is the amount of infringement proceedings opened against Italy – at each stage – in the last five years. We will compare these figures against the average record of the other 14 member states (see fig. 2). Data still show a systematic lack of observance of EU norms (treaties, regulations and directives), and a delay, compared to those of the other EU partners, which tend to be grow from stage to stage. Even the number of judgements ruled by the ECJ against the member states is highly disproportional as regards Italy²³.

progress of the governmental bill (which normally consists in far-reaching delegation powers seldom employed by the government itself). The degree of bipartisanship is quite surprising: only the 1992 Legge Comunitaria has been approved with less than 90% pros; more recently the 1994 law had 13 votes against, the 1995-97 (!) only 1 con, whereas the 1998 law received 9 votes against.

²² For a uniform comparison we have measured the distance in percentage which divided Italy from the other “traditional” eleven EC member states: it was 2.1% in 1992, 1.6% in 1993, 3.8% in 1994, 4.5% in 1995, 3.6% in 1996 and 1.9% in 1997.

²³ 12.5% of the judgements ruled for infringements started in 1993 were against Italy; the percentage rose to 41.9% for infringements started in 1994, and to 42.9% for those started in 1995. Later

Fig. 2 Infringements proceeding (1993-1997)



Source: EU Commission, "Quindicesima relazione annuale sul controllo dell'applicazione del diritto comunitario (1997)"

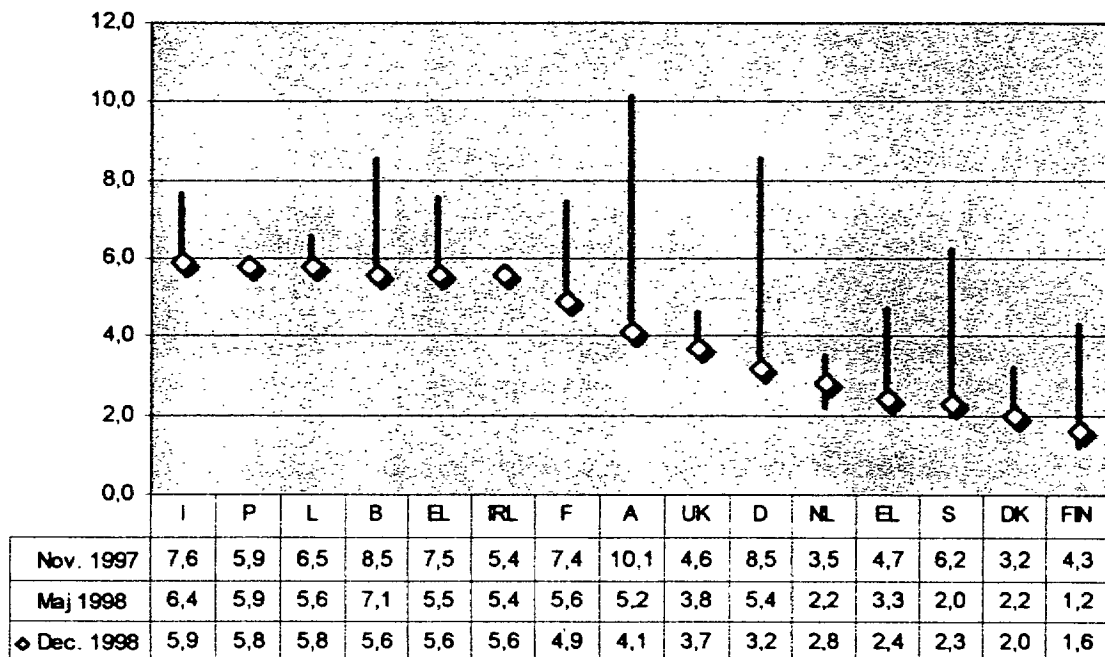
Finally, we would like to turn to a subgroup of EU norms which has always been considered strategic for the integration of Europe, namely Internal Market measures. At the beginning of the '90s, the Italian Annual Community law attained its best performance precisely in this field. DG XV constantly monitors the progress shown by member states through its "Single-Market Scoreboard". Thus we are able to make an updated evaluation of Italy's efforts.

Data displayed in figure 3 represent the percentages of non-compliance to Internal Market directives in three different periods: November 1997, May 1998 and December 1998. While the tag portrays the final situation at the end of the last year, the lines show the progress (or small regress in some cases) made in the considered interval by each member state.

infringements have still not reached the ECJ stage. See even Mendrinou (1996) with data for the 1978-93 period.

At the end of 1998 Italy had the worst record. Though it constantly showed a poor performance, there have been other major countries who recently had some "difficulties" in adjusting to Internal Market directives. For example, Austria, Germany and Belgium occupied in 1997 a lower position. Since the DG XV launched a major effort to finally complete the Internal Market, directly contacting national governments and requesting a precise timetable for recovering their defective status, most countries have exhibited remarkable improvements. The same did not happen for Italy, which continued to lag in its backward position until "reaching" its current awkward standing.

Fig. 3 Percentage of non-incorporated Internal Market directives (Nov. 1997- Dec. 1998)



Source: DG XV, "Internal Market Scoreboard"

Hypothesis C.2 The content, actors and discourse of the "new" policy-making displays the European influence

The quantitative test does not leave many way outs for arguing that there has been a europeanization of policy-making processes. Actually, at a closer qualitative

inspection things looks quite differently. We won't certainly maintain that the data hereto presented are meaningless, and there won't be any real integration of Italy in the EU policy-making without significant progress at that level, but the overall picture may appear rosier from a different perspective.

The most significant U-turn directly produced by the EU membership has obviously been the joining of the first tier of states entering the Euro-zone (Sbragia 1998, Verzichelli 1999, Vassallo 2000). A sequence of hard choices (Sbragia 1999), deemed impossible for a country like Italy, has characterized the macro-economic policy since the Amato government. The unexpected outcome, together with its durability and sustainability, wouldn't have been possible "simply" through a mix of cuts and increased taxation. It required a complex restructuring of strategic policy areas which is still continuing. For this reason the European influence spilled over different sectors such as pension policy, health policy, labor and industrial policy, cohesion policy and, generally speaking, every high-spending policy sector (Ferrera and Gualmini 1999). Emu served as catalyst for a sequence of planned and accomplished reforms that range from the welfare to the administrative organization, from budgetary procedures to decentralization. The europeanization of the policy-making has been both the source and the goal of these efforts.

Though the path-dependency constrains the magnitude and degree of success of the attainable reforms, there are visible signs of discontinuity with the policy strategies normally followed in the near past. Pension policies – currently once more on the verge of political debates – have been reformed three times in the '90s: the current contribution formula, retirement age and standardization of public and private sectors draw the Italian pension system nearer to that of other EU nations. The introduction and strengthening of selectivity measures – much in the vein of north-European welfare models – has amended the health policy and inaugurated new assistance programmes and tax benefits (Ferrera 1999). Privatization and liberalization have been central for the economic strategies of the center-left governments, while territorial pacts, flexibility and tax incentives – well known

European catchwords – deeply characterize their labor policies. Even the use of structural funds, the second major shame of Italy's EU membership, seem to have registered substantive improvements²⁴. Now, the increased political credibility of the country even permits a more active role of the governmental élite at the European level²⁵.

To summarize, all the major policy areas have been directly or indirectly subjected to the European influence. Their content, the range of alternatives taken into account, the way solutions are publicly defended echo policy processes occurred in other countries and in the EU itself.

We believe that these transformations, catalyzed by EU constraints but pushed through the window of opportunity of the overall crisis of the Italian political system, find their explanation at a micro rather than macro level. Reforms have been discussed, suggested and implemented by a "new" constellation of actors which tend to resemble more an epistemic community than a partisan coalition. External experts, academic consultants, leading internal technocrats, think tanks specialists have been more and more "internalized" in those policy processes (Radaelli 1999). We can't here elaborate further on this point, but the composition of these networks is certainly more cosmopolitan and open to European influences than past policy-makers. They have taken the opportunity of a regress in the veto powers of political parties to act as brokers of ideas and discourses that are in good currency beyond the Italian borders. The qualitative influence of europeanization has taken this indirect cognitive path, rather than the main route of institutional and juridical adjustment.

²⁴ See EU Commission, "Nona relazione sull'utilizzo dei fondi strutturali (1997)" and data reported in the Treasury web site <http://www.tesoro.it>

²⁵ The Italian Commissioner Monti criticized some normally untouchable EU partners; the former Treasury Minister Ciampi proposed new structural reforms for fighting the economic stagnation at the Ecofin council; the Italian representation managed to obtain most of the expected benefits from the bargaining around the Agenda2000 project; the adoption of the Italian concertative style through "social pacts" has been suggested even at the EU level, etc.

4. Conclusion

The adjustment to European pressures and policy models have been hereto realized without any reform of the institutional framework. Quite the contrary. There have been feed-backs from the policy arena to the political one, pragmatically modifying the functioning of the Italian democracy. The performance and credibility of the Italian political system will remain under the closed scrutiny of the financial organizations and the EU partners. For some observers, the exceptional period has already come to an end and there won't be any "new Italy" without constitutional reforms. Anyway, the general surprise for the achievements of the last few years – epitomized by the unexpected entry in the Monetary Union – "left on the ground" two of the mostly used stereotypes regarding Italy: its innate eccentric character, and the famous adage from "Il Gattopardo" about the unchanging changes.

From our point of view, the interesting thing is that the Italian political system has modified itself more in its practices than in its structures. Europeanization – both in the sense of normalization and openness towards EU influence – has been the outcome of changes that happened at the actor's level, not at the institutional one. A consensual but ideologically divided parliament still struggles against a collegial executive that leads an underprofessionalized bureaucracy in a context of contested regionalism; the Italian record in transposing EU norms is still the worse in Europe; the Parliament still deplores the democratic unaccountability of the government in European matters, and the government itself is still unable to exploit its relative isolation and procedural autonomy. However, substantial reforms that permitted the entry in the Euro-zone have been adopted; regions are beginning to spend their structural funds more efficiently; the politico-administrative élite is reorienting its professional preferences, policy ideas circulate at a faster pace both from and to Europe, and policy networks have been extended to cosmopolitan actors and groups. There isn't any proof that the europeanization process will consolidate itself, extending its influence from the bottom to the top, from actors to structures, from

praxis to institutions. But even the necessity of this path has to be demonstrated. We would rather argue in a different way.

The europeanization process “hit” against the sovereignty of member states, compelling them to modify several of their political attributes. At the same time, europeanization modified the Union itself. Its deepening and widening – the new competencies and the new members – rendered the EU more complex and political than ever before. The risk of its monopolization from behalf of a single country – e.g. the germanization of the Union – or of an historic axis – e.g. Paris-Berlin – has never been so distant. The European Union is (and will increasingly become) a power sharing polity. The minimization of external decision-making costs (those potentially deriving to outsiders in case of closed and secluded processes) will continue to be a central concern in EU policy-making: during the past, the main reason was the defense of national sovereignties; in the future, it may well be the deliberate political strategy chosen by cooperative élites which recognize the dangers of a confrontational style.

If this is true, consensual attitudes will represent valuable political resources, and cooperative dispositions an unavoidable ingredient of the future EU politics. Behind the appearances, Italy has a prolonged tradition of both. Consensualism institutionalized itself under a polarized surface, and has not experienced relevant drawbacks during the recent majoritarian mood²⁶: the propensity for mediation and compromise, the inclination for rhetoric and heresthetics, the predilection for creative solutions and arcane bargaining still are at the core of the every day policy and politics. These elements might turn to be pivotal and appealing features of the future of europeanization. In that case, Italy will be ready.

²⁶ See, e.g. Giuliani (1997); the analysis has been recently updated confirming the consensual law-making style even in the current legislature. It may be argued that this propensity favored the symbolic and mediating role often played by Italy.

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