*Personalistic leadership, party politics, and the quality of democracy: the case of Italy**

Liderazgo personal, política partidista y la calidad de la democracia: El caso de Italia

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SUMMARY

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RESUMEN

La historia política de Italia no se caracteriza por la aparición de grandes líderes políticos. Solamente en forma excepcional pocas figuras de liderazgo, tales como el héroe del nuevo esplendor Giuseppe Garibaldi, jugó un papel significativo y ampliamente alabado. Otros personajes, especialmente Benito Mussolini, han representado un régimen autoritario, por tanto contribuyendo a la desconfianza general de líderes poderosos. El presente artículo explora cuáles han sido y son todavía los obstáculos culturales e institucionales para el surgimiento de líderes poderosos. El más importante obstáculo cultural puede encontrarse en el sentimiento anti político ampliamente

ABSTRACT

Italian political history is not characterized by the appearance of major political leaders. Only exceptionally have few leadership figures, such as the Risorgimento hero Giuseppe Garibaldi, played a significant and widely praised role. Others, especially Benito Mussolini, have characterized an authoritarian regime, therefore contributing to the general distrust of powerful leaders. This paper explores which have been and are the cultural and institutional obstacles to the emergence of powerful leaders. The most important cultural obstacle can be found in the widely shared anti-political

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compartido por la población. En el período posterior a la Segunda Guerra Mundial, la actitud prevaleciente de aversión a líderes fuertes fue manifestada conjuntamente por los dos partidos mayores, los Cristianos Demócratas y los comunistas. Esta aversión se institucionalizó en la Constitución Italiana, la cual contenía un tradicional modelo de gobierno parlamentario débil. A pesar del énfasis de Silvio Berlusconi en sus cualidades de liderazgo personal, o quizás precisamente debido a esta extrema personalización, la desconfianza hacia líderes posiblemente dominantes permanece amplia entre la población. Sus consecuencias no parecen ser positivas para la calidad de la democracia en Italia.
PALABRAS CLAVE: liderazgo, personalización, tirano, gobierno parlamentario, calidad de la democracia.

sentiment. In the post-Second World War period, the prevailing attitude of dislike of strong leaders was jointly exhibited by both major parties, the Christian Democrats and the Communists. This dislike was institutionalized in the Italian Constitution that provides for a traditional model of weak parliamentary government. In spite of Silvio Berlusconi's emphasis on his personal leadership qualities, or perhaps exactly because of his extreme personalization, distrust toward possibly dominant political leaders remains widespread. Its consequences do not seem to be positive for the quality of Italian democracy.
KEYWORDS: *leadership, personalization, tyrant, parliamentary government, quality of democracy.*

Year 2011 has marked the 150th anniversary of the political unification of Italy. A lot has been written on the *Risorgimento*, on the need to recreate the feelings that led to a huge collective effort, though produced by a small minority of Italians, on the demand for a more widespread civic culture. The incumbent President of the Italian Republic, Giorgio Napolitano, has emerged as a great and convincing "preacher" of what is now called "constitutional patriotism". The decisive contributions to the *Risorgimento* of Italy as a nation made by the group of political leaders called *Destra Storica* (Historical Right), have been celebrated. However, not enough has been said with respect to the Prime Minister of the small State of Sardinia and Piedmont, Camillo Benso, Count of Cavour, the man who masterminded the events that led to the unification of Italy. Never especially popular, Cavour took third place behind Giuseppe Garibaldi, the most effective freedom fighter whose statue is present in almost all Italian squares, and Giuseppe Mazzini, in a way the ideologue of the movements for a "Young Italy" and a "Young Europe". In practice, Cavour was quite distrustful of both, because of their "adventurism", and rightly so even though Garibaldi's personal contributions were truly decisive.

Once the unification had been achieved and Rome had become the capital of Italy (1870), Garibaldi, never a political leader for "normal" times, retired like Cincinnatus in a small Sardinian island where he lived

the rest of his life in austerity. Since, his fame and appreciation have become forever established in a popular saying that goes this way: "*Non si parla male di Garibaldi*", that is, "One shall not criticize Garibaldi" or "No bad words about Garibaldi". Decades later, in the 1948 critical elections, his name and face were utilized for the logo of the Popular Front (the coalition of Communists and Socialists) almost in order to reassure Italian voters (to no avail). Having been instrumental in rejoining the South of Italy with the North, Garibaldi has become the *bête noire* of the Northern League in its quest for the autonomy, independence, secession from Italy of the Northern macro-region they call Padania. Endowed with significant leadership qualities, Garibaldi never held any institutional office. He cannot be considered a Statesman whose life and actions provide a source of inspiration. Perhaps, his prestige derives also, in an important way, from his not being identified as a "politician". This point, to which I will return, must be stressed because it carries a lot of weight in explaining why the most ambitious Italians may have not oriented their life to the conquest of positions of political leadership.

1. Cultural/historical legacies

Leaving aside the three men who have been positively responsible for the unification of Italy: Camillo Benso di Cavour, the Prime Minister, Giuseppe Mazzini, an activist and political propagandist, and Giuseppe Garibaldi, above all a military hero (also in Latin America), only another statesman succeeded in acquiring some popularity in the gradual construction and expansion of Italian democracy: Giovanni Giolitti. For more than twenty years master of Italian politics, the Liberal politician Giolitti patiently devoted his time and energies to the building of a decent and viable, though somewhat fragile, democracy that, against his wishes, was swept off by World War One. His, overall positive, legacy (Salomone 1945) is rarely praised and, most certainly, he is not extolled as a statesman whose qualities deserve to be imitated.

Benito Mussolini, the founder and *duce* of Italian fascism, product and protagonist of the post-World War One turmoil, stands out, for better and worse, as the most famous Italian political leader. The prototype of the authoritarian and arbitrary ruler, Mussolini did his best in popularizing his image, through many cinema clips, famous slogans written on the walls of buildings all over Italy, the revival of the glorious past of the Roman Empire, and his flamboyant personality. Notwithstanding his

poor and negative record, after all he was ousted when and because Italy was in shambles, he remains the most famous figure of Italian political leadership. Not even the Italian Renaissance *condottieri* did ever acquire a status comparable to Mussolini's. The most important testimony to this depressing shortage of political leaders is represented by the splendid, but very saddened, invocation launched by Machiavelli in 1513 for the appearance of a Prince capable of unifying Italy. Finally, it may not be of minor importance to emphasize that, when looking for tragic personalities with leadership qualities, Shakespeare always addressed his imagination outside Italy. It was up to Verona (Romeo and Juliet) and Venice (Othello, Jago, and Desdemona; Shylock, the Jewish merchant) to provide magnificent and eternal characters who had nothing to do with politics and leadership.

As to Mussolini, he did not have any successor endowed with similar leadership qualities. Though made by brave combatants and partisans not deprived of heroic qualities, not even the Resistance Movement against the Nazis (and their Fascist puppet regime) produced outstanding political leaders. Indeed, only one of them, the widely admired Ferruccio Parri, was given the opportunity to transfer his prestige into the highest political office briefly serving as Head of the Government (June 1945-December 1945 for a total of 172 days) quickly to be replaced by the secretary of the Christian Democratic Party: Alcide De Gasperi, in office from December 1945 up to March 1953. From then on political leadership in Italy meant first and foremost party leadership.

It was to be, at the same time, the byproduct and consequence of a party career as well as the outcome of internal party struggles. Because of the imposition of democratic centralism as their organizational model, the Communists were able to control and to repress any and all internal struggles for leadership. They also followed the model of a mini cult of personality with respect to their secretary, Palmiro Togliatti (1891-1964), nicknamed "the best" (Il Migliore). A more diversified party organization, the Christian Democrats were a playing ground for several oligarchies (party factions) whose competition usually produced weak party leaders. The Marxist-Communist ideology put the party well above the persons. The Catholic mentality was bent to theorize in a more or less hypocritical vein that any political commitment had to be performed as a "service" to the fellow citizens. There existed a more secular view of the relationship between politics and society among the other parties. Political ambitions were neither denied nor repressed.

Indeed, political careers were by no means considered negatively and the ability to formulate reforms and to implement good policies was considered the true measure of political success. But the influence of minor parties and their leaders on Italian political culture was quite limited. Since together the Christian Democrats and the Communists were supported by no less than 65 percent of the voters, their view of political leadership became and remained dominant for forty years or so.

The Christian Democratic and Communist skepticism if not hostility toward visible and strong political leadership does not mean at all that both parties did not produce and did not have significant leaders, but "ideologically" political ambitions and popularity, the visibility and the personalization of politics had to be hidden, denied, and tamed. Indeed, the taming of personal ambitions was an organizational imperative. The Christian Democrats had to reach and to re-create ever-changing equilibria among their internal diversified and conflicting factions without allowing any single political leader to stand out. The Communists could not hamper their "organizational weapon" by putting aside the method of cooptation and accepting all the perils of competition. The Christian Democrats also enjoyed the advantage of having access to top *institutional* offices as separate from *party* offices. For the Communists, the prestige of being part of the ruling group (*il gruppo dirigente*), made at the most of 10-15 leaders, collectively engaged in a historical enterprise, was enough to satisfy their ambition and to defuse occasional succession struggles. Memorable was the conflict that followed Togliatti's death in 1964, while the succession crisis occasioned by Berlinguer's untimely death in 1984 was solved by applying purely bureaucratic criteria.

Not that the Christian Democrats were unable to find, recruit, select, and promote political and institutional leaders, capable of serving with success as party secretaries and Prime Ministers. But none of those leaders really excited popular passions or became famous in Italy and abroad. Indeed, almost all of them were quite parochial in their origins, in their goals, in their careers. Aldo Moro stands out not so much for his being prominent on the Italian political scene for two decades (Pasquino 2012), but above all for his tragic death following his kidnapping and murder by the Red Brigades (March 16-May 9, 1978). Still alive, the 93 year old Giulio Andreotti is known for his unquenchable thirst for power and for his obscure dealings, certainly not for some noble deeds or for imaginative political strategies. Survival was the name of Andreotti's game, not leadership. On the whole, the Christian Democratic Pantheon does not

accommodate any prominent leaders except *Alcide De Gasperi*, Prime Minister from 1946 to 1953, a very austere and sober personality who was totally uninterested in his own visibility or popularity.

Barred from governing positions at the national level, it was up to several long-serving mayors to become the most popular Communist personalities. Rarely, however, were those mayors promoted to significant national roles within the party hierarchy. In a way, the Communist leadership story is highly instructive. On the one hand, capable and popular leaders did emerge from their ranks. On the other, political power was strictly concentrated in a small group of national politicians having no local governing experience, born, raised, and promoted within the party organization. This is also the trajectory of the most beloved Communist party secretary, Enrico Berlinguer (1922-1984), who was fatally struck delivering a speech at a party rally. Admired for his austere life style and for his absolute dedication to "politics with ethics", Berlinguer never held any office outside the party. He was totally political and totally opposed to the personalization of politics. His personal sobriety and rigorous behavior left a profound mark. Even though no Communist has been capable of claiming Berlinguer's legacy, all the post-Communists retain some disdain with respect to most instances of the personalization of politics. A contradiction emerged when the newly created Partito Democratico decided to write into its Charter the holding of primaries for elective offices. To make the matter even more complicated, since 2007 the election of the secretaries of the Partito Democratico is open both to the members of the party and to all those who declare to accept the platform of the party. Though technically, these elections are not primaries, the campaigns run by the candidates must stress some personal characteristics. Because those campaigns have repeatedly succeeded in mobilizing millions of voters, they have gone a long way towards the personalization of politics. But a fair amount of, perhaps hypocritical, hostility toward the very idea of leaders who would exhibit and "exploit" their personal qualities still looms large over party members, left-wing activists at large, most left leaning commentators, broadcasters, and intellectuals (namely, an influential association called "Libertà e Giustizia").

Finally, not only in the light of the most recent events, that is the appearance of a new political movement launched by a comedian, Beppe Grillo, having a strong inclination to demagoguery, and called Five Stars (Cinque Stelle), one must mention anti-politics among the cultural and historical legacies militating against the search for and the advent of

strong political leadership. To be more precise, since the beginning of the XXth century, anti-politics has been a recurrent phenomenon, already present at the inception of the Italian Republic when a playwright founded the short-lasted Movement called Uomo Qualunque (Man in the Street or Everyman's Movement). Overall anti-politics (Tarchi 2003) was kept under control by the major parties during the first long phase of the Italian Republic. Nevertheless, all the surveys have repeatedly tapped strong anti-party feelings and the widely shared negative assessment of the politicians. In Italy, politics has never been considered a noble and dignified profession/activity and none of those who practiced it enjoy any kind of prestige. This may have meant that those endowed with leadership qualities may have decided to choose more prestigious careers.

2. The apparent break: Berlusconi's ascent and something more

All the received and cherished ideas contrary to the building up of political and institutional leadership were suddenly and sharply challenged by three decisive events: 1) the collapse of the old party system; 2) the new 1993 electoral law, and 3) Berlusconi's "taking the field" (of Italian politics). As to the party system, its two main pillars had been eroding and declining throughout the 1980's. Their leadership had been deliberately and blatantly challenged by the Socialist Party's secretary Bettino Craxi, who used his strong personality as a weapon to open political spaces for him and the PSI within what he called the bi polarism "DC-PCI". Acclaimed as much as criticized, he was often portrayed in several cartoons with Mussolini's black shirt, boots and hat, Craxi's challenge destabilized the Italian political landscape. New social strata produced by a changing Italian society, who had become more prosperous and were looking for different forms of interest representation, appeared to be electorally available for the Socialists. In any case, the old politics of the DC and the PCI was no longer acceptable to them. Following the collapse of the Berlin wall in November 1989, the Communists sank into a profound crisis that could not be overcome just by changing the name and logo of the party. No longer useful as a barrier against Communist electoral challenges, the Christian Democrats entered into their own political and organizational crisis. They were abandoned by a growing number of voters, suffered a couple of splits and fundamentally disintegrated themselves. In neither transformation any new and appealing personality emerged. By all stan-

dards the 1992-1994 Italian regime crisis was made more serious by the shortage of political leaders, old and young.

Leaving aside all the technicalities of the 1993 electoral law, the most important element from the perspective of political leadership is represented by the fact that three fourths of the parliamentarians had to be elected in single member constituencies. However, though severely weakened, all the parties retained the decisive power to select and to nominate their candidates. A lethal combination of too many safe seats, due to the peculiar Italian electoral geography (Diamanti 2009), with the intense bargaining among potential coalition partners, prevented the emergence and "consolidation" of candidates capable of becoming very popular in their constituencies. Quite disappointingly, but not for the parties that continued in their politics as usual, the potentialities for change of single-member constituencies went all lost. To make matters worse, in 2005 the risks entailed in the plurality electoral system in single member constituencies proved to be the main factor in the decision taken by Berlusconi's majority to draft yet another "reform" of the electoral that swept off all the opportunities for some personalization of politics. All parliamentarians have been elected in 2006 and 2008 according to their ranking in long and blocked lists of candidates. This means that, in practice, party and faction leaders nominate all of them, winning the long-lasting "gratitude" (or, better, discipline, personal loyalty, and subservience) of those who are elected.

There cannot be any doubt that, positively and/or negatively, Silvio Berlusconi constitutes the most important factor in the overhauling of the entire approach, conception, and practice of political and institutional leadership in Italy. Launching what was meant to be a splendid example of catch-all party Otto Kirchheimer's style (ideology, members, interest groups), Berlusconi had very clear in his mind that extolling his personal qualities and many successes, in the field of real estate building, commercial television, football, he was frontally challenging all traditional Italian politicians. In his words, those politicians have "never worked". Again, almost as if he had read Kirchheimer's seminal article (1966), Berlusconi did not address his electoral and political appeal to any *classe gardée*. His was a purely populist appeal. The political movement called Forza Italia (Go, Italy!) could be but a vehicle through which a soon to become "popular" leader was reaching out to the Italian people, misrepresented or no longer represented by the crumbling former "mass" parties (for a critical view see Calise 2005). Berlusconi's personality was the message sent to a large number of Italians who were founding themselves in the

midst of a Weberian crisis of collective anxiety. Yes, Berlusconi briefly enjoyed a charismatic window of opportunity. He was challenging the past, promising a better future, achieving the miracle of defeating the left that was already savoring the sweet fruit of victory. His prominent personality was reflected and amplified by his three national TV channels, not created by them. The posh booklet *Una storia italiana*, containing his narrative fully centered on his personal trajectory and remarkable achievements was sent free of charge to several millions of Italian families (see the overall interpretation by Mancini 2011). Has Berlusconi cured the Italians of their distrust toward strong personalities in politics or, quite to the contrary, his experiences, especially his demise has proved a sort of confirmation for public opinion and many other (would be)leaders that personalization must be eschewed?

With respect to Berlusconi's conscious, deliberate, and grand personalization of politics, two quite different experiences stand out. On one hand, it is important to emphasize and analyze the case of the Northern League. On the other hand, one is confronted with the dire plight of the post-Communists and their allies in the search for an antidote to Berlusconi's leadership. The case of the Northern League has received a lot of attention, more because of its territorial entrenchment and its xenophobic, quasi racist themes, than for the nature and type of its political movement. It was only in the spring of 2012, in the wake of major scandals concerning the use of the movement's funds by the so-called Magic Circle, that is, those surrounding, protecting and, perhaps, manipulating the ageing leader Umberto Bossi, that the attention was finally directed to the leadership and its style.

By all means and standards, from the very beginning the Northern League was a personalistic party led by a populist leader appealing to one specific, clearly pre-defined electorate: Northern voters living in the macro-region dubbed Padania. Two elements unique to the development of the Northern League must be stressed. First, the movement is indeed to be considered a one man's outstanding achievement. The League would neither exist nor be strong without the endless amount of time, personal energies, devotion that Umberto Bossi invested in his construction and guide. This has become even more evident today because the decline of his leadership has been followed and accompanied by a serious retrenchment of the movement as such. Umberto Bossi himself was the League. Without Umberto Bossi the League is already running the serious risk of being just one very small party, a *partitino*.

The second element, quite important when analyzing the League and attempting to understand and explain its success, is the lack of television exposure. For several reasons, the traditional parties were capable of preventing TV appearances of spokesmen for the League and for a long period of time the money to buy TV space was not in the hands of the League. This meant that the movement gradually grew simply because of mouth-to-mouth propaganda and, even more, because, in addition to Bossi's relentless efforts, all League's candidates were the product of their territory. They all had their own base, their own turf where they were living and working, performing several activities in many, usually small, communities. However, only Bossi could fully personalize his politics. Indeed, in a way, he was obliged to do so both by the requests of his followers and by the political and organizational imperative to implant and expand his movement. On a smaller scale, one can state that on both counts he was even more successful than Berlusconi.

The non-leadership strategy was the easiest fallback position for all those opposing Berlusconi. In any case, for deeply ingrained ideological reasons, they could not proceed to emphasizing their personal qualities. In practice, they were all ill-prepared and unable to make good use of those political and institutional mechanisms that might have suggested to them to resort to something peculiar and positive in their promise of political leadership. Berlusconi defeated them all in different periods: Occhetto in 1994; Rutelli in 2001; Veltroni in 2008, amassing a considerable electoral advantage. True, Berlusconi was twice defeated (in 1996 and in 2006) by Romano Prodi who neither desired nor was capable to personalize his politics. In either case, Berlusconi's defeats were most certainly not caused by superior leadership qualities demonstrated by Prodi, but by the defection, from Berlusconi's coalition, of critical allies: in 1996 the League; in 2006, the Union of the Center (Vaccari 2006).

At the time of my writing, the center left has not solved its contradictions regarding the question of the leadership. Aware that there exists the electoral and political imperative to put forward a competent, reassuring, inspiring and attractive leader, the center-left is still hampered by the suspicions of too many of its active supporters who are against any identification of a strong and powerful leader. They seem to prefer the image of a meek and sweet person to that of a personality endowed with unquestionable decision-making capabilities. The overall cultural hostility toward the existence of a powerful leadership willing to exercise all the powers of his/her institutional office has absolutely not gone away.

3. Institutional rules

The Italian Republic was founded in 1946 on the ashes of a militarily defeated authoritarian regime and at a time when, a point that must be stressed, in Europe and elsewhere, there existed few other democratic regimes whose institutions could be imitated. Democratic Italy became a traditional parliamentary regime in which it is up to the President of the Republic to appoint the President of the Council of Ministers and, on his (so far not a single female has ever been asked to fill the office of President of the Council) proposal, the Ministers. Both Chambers, the House of Deputies and the Senate, have the power explicitly to vote the confidence to the government as well as to withdraw it. The power to dissolve Parliament is not in the hands of the head of the government, but in those of the President of the Republic following his (no female President either) consultation with the Speakers of both Chambers who are in the best situation to evaluate whether there will be enough support for yet another government to come into existence in order to prevent an early dissolution. Contrary to most, if not all, parliamentary democracies, the Italian head of government is not a Prime Minister well above his Ministers. He is a *primus inter pares*, this is why he is more precisely called President of the Council of Ministers. It is not just a matter of terminology. It is a matter of formal and informal powers, of the definition of the role of the head of government which has profoundly affected the production of institutional leadership.

According to several commentators, Mussolini's shadow loomed large on the 1946-1948 Constituent Assembly. Charged with the complex task of writing the democratic Constitution for Republican Italy, the members of the Assembly reached a widespread consensus on not giving significant institutional powers to the head of the Italian government. They desired to prevent the appearance of a situation in which a powerful head of government could subvert the new and fragile democratic framework. Defined as the "complex of the tyrant", the overall agreement was translated into the creation of a figure endowed with limited institutional powers. For different reasons, above all the Christian Democrats and the Communists were satisfied with this outcome. Institutionally weak, the President of the Council of Ministers could be easily controlled by his fellow Christian Democrats. Since he could not be and was not to become powerful, the Communists thought that they would enjoy greater institutional space for their opposition activities.

Even though the majority of the Constituent Assembly immediately realized that a weak President of the Council of Ministers could become a problem and passed a recommendation to find ways to stabilize the government and strengthen the powers of the President of the Council of Ministers, almost nothing was done until 1988. Even then the minor changes in a law defining the status and the powers of the Presidency have proved to be largely cosmetic. Most certainly, those changes have not created a strong institutional leadership.

What counts the most with reference to the question of the political and institutional powers of the head of the Italian government is the different procedures through which he was in the past and may now be designated and appointed. Formally and constitutionally, the power to appoint the head of government has always been located in the hands of the President of the Republic. In practice, however, from 1946 to 1992, there existed only two possibilities. The parties that had agreed to give birth to a governmental coalition would submit to the President of the Republic just one name and the President would simply accept that name. There is no evidence of the President ever rejecting the candidate proposed by the parties. When the parties had not reached a consensus, they would give informally to the President of the Republic a roster of names. In all known cases, this roster was made exclusively of Christian Democratic candidates because DC factions had been unable to converge on a single candidate. Following a round of consultations with the secretaries of all potential governmental partners, the President of the Republic would appoint the candidate representing the point of equilibrium within the coalition. Understandably, this procedure was not meant to produce a strong head of government in a position to make the most of his institutional powers.

Indeed, even though the Constitution clearly states that the Ministers are "proposed" by the head of government to the President of the Republic who proceeds to their official appointment, the head of government always found himself on the receiving side. That is, very few exceptions aside, he could only accept/ratify the names given to him by the leaders of the Christian Democratic factions and by the secretaries of the parties making up the governmental coalition. All those appointments were never made exclusively or substantially on the basis of competence nor of confidence, but of political/partisan preference buttressed by the coalitional power (in some cases, the most appropriate term was blackmail) of the partners.

The allocation of portfolios was always based on the assessment of the political weight and power of each party. Hence the frequent govern-

mental crises, to be considered the surrogate for the lack or impossibility of governmental turnovers, were fundamentally meant to reallocate power and portfolios among the governmental partners and the party factions without proceeding to early dissolutions of Parliament and to new elections. The Christian Democrats had even designed a specific method measuring the importance of the various ministries. Obviously, the Ministers themselves could not claim significant institutional powers nor were asked or allowed to exhibit exceptional institutional qualities. That is, nobody could expect to become Prime Minister because of his excellent performance in a ministerial position. The Italian word *partitocrazia* precisely captures the phenomenon of the inordinate amount of political and institutional power in the hands of party leaders, none of them willing to allow the appearance and emergence of leaders obtaining and exercising independent institutional and constitutional powers. Strong parties meant weak institutions; strong party leaders meant weak institutional leaders; strong partycracy meant weak, that is, compressed and limited democracy (power of the people).

The overall conclusion is that until 1994, Italian institutional leadership has not been the product of electoral and political competition, but the consequence of a power game played by a small group (five) of parties and their political leaders. All Prime Ministers were, one way or another, designated by the parties which agreed to give birth to a governmental coalition. The process was not dissimilar from the way most governments are formed in other parliamentary democracies, at the time, especially, the Fourth French Republic, the Netherlands, Belgium. The difference was, I surmise (Müller, Strøm 2000) , that the choice of the Prime Minister made by the secretaries of the coalition parties was never meant to reward politicians endowed with significant leadership qualities. Moreover, all politicians turned Prime Ministers according to this procedure proved highly unlikely (and generally unwilling) to "exaggerate" in showing leadership qualities.

They were much aware that their permanence in those institutional offices was largely conditioned to their behaving as delegates of the parties' secretaries who were the principals. Taking all this into account, one can easily understand and explain both why all Italian governments have been unstable and all Italian Prime Ministers have been unable to demonstrate major leadership qualities (Mershon 2002). From the perspective of their personal and political success, those Prime Ministers who have thrived and were returned to office several times (such as, above all, Aldo Moro

and Giulio Andreotti) have practiced the art of intermediation among a variety of competing interests. If not the opposite of an authoritative decision-making style, political intermediation consists in allowing all organized interests to reach more or less the same degree of attention in expressing their preferences. Then, the Prime Minister will meet their expectations and demands not choosing among those groups, but ranking them in terms of the political weight each of them has.

The game is allowed to continue until some preferences clearly appear shared by a conspicuous majority of interests. The decision that follows is just an inevitable consequence of the re-aggregation of the most important interests. All the other interests remain confident that their turn will come perhaps because of a different, always possible, re-aggregation. Even the most dynamic of the Prime Ministers, such as Amintore Fanfani and, much later, Bettino Craxi remained prisoners of the wide network of interests surrounding the parties and enjoying easy access to the public administration. The Italian model of symmetric bicameralism was (and is) quite permeable by organized interest of all kinds capable of preventing or postponing any governmental decision that could prove detrimental for them. A similar experience has characterized the Fourth French Republic, politically and institutionally quite like the Italian model of government. Indeed, the Fourth Republic did not produce any political or institutional leader of note (to the exception, perhaps, of Pierre Mendès-France) and collapsed after twelve years only of a very turbulent life.

Though unwilling and unable to produce powerful political and institutional leader, the Christian Democrats succeeded in stabilizing their rule and in giving to the Italian Republic a longer life-span. Not surprisingly, when, unable to reform their party organization, the Christian Democrats entered into a slow, but irreversible decline, the doors were opened for the transformation of the political system.

The institutional conditions changed partially, but producing an impact, following the reform of the electoral law made in 1994. The new electoral system was based on a combination of plurality and proportional elements. Three-fourths of the seats were allocated by plurality in single-member constituencies. The remaining seats were allocated to party lists applying a proportional formula. The most important "institutional" consequence was that all the parties were obliged to construct pre-electoral coalitions and let the voters know in advance the name of their candidate to the office of Prime Minister. Though, technically, not yet an institutional innovation, Berlusconi proved himself capable of

immediately taking advantage of what was an electoral imperative and started personalizing his politics. For all the reasons indicated above neither the post-Communists nor the post-Christian Democrats were in a position to promote a visible leadership of their own.

Thus, the new situation appeared to reverse what Italian politics had been until then. On the one hand, there was a highly visible political (and institutional, since Berlusconi won the office of head of government on his first attempt in March 1994) leadership whose party was a loose coalition of neophytes and second rank politicians and could thrive almost exclusively because of the personality of its founder and leader. On the other hand, there were the two parties that had dominated the political history of the Italian Republic. Both proved unable for ideological and structural reasons to produce a viable alternative leader capable of competing against Berlusconi. Nevertheless, they scored an upset electoral victory in 1996.

The victory was the product of the less than appealing personality of a Catholic Professor of Economics, appointed by the Christian Democrats to Chief Executive Officer of the most important State company IRI (Institute for Industrial Reconstruction). Thanks to the joint support of the post-Christian Democrats and the post-Communists, plus several civil associations, he led a composite center-left coalition called Olive Tree. Romano Prodi was neither willing nor capable of personalizing his political and institutional leadership. Though he twice (1996 and 2006) defeated Berlusconi, his victories were most certainly not due to personality factors. In any case, what remains to be explained is why in both occasions Prodi lost his governing office respectively after slightly more and slightly less than two years. He was definitely not a strong political and institutional leader.

But how strong a leader could Berlusconi be within the framework of a traditional parliamentary Republic? The existence of a lag between the high political expectations raised by the electoral procedures and the allegedly limited institutional opportunities provided to the office of Prime Minister has been the source of many political and institutional controversies and clashes. Even more so when Italian voters were made to believe that they were actually electing the Prime Minister simply because the name of the candidate to Palazzo Chigi (the Prime Minister's headquarters in Rome) had been written and enshrined into the symbol of his party. This maquillage could not bypass and eliminate the constitutional requirements for the appointment and the replacement of Italian heads of

government nor for the formation, the transformation and substitution of Italian governments.

At the roots of all clashes and controversies I believe one finds Silvio Berlusconi's exorbitant personality. For Berlusconi, political leadership has been the logical inevitable continuation/prosecution of his much self praised entrepreneurial leadership with all the pros and cons that such type of leadership entails. I daresay that Berlusconi seriously thought that he could govern Italy the same way he had been "governing" his companies and his media empire. Hence, he has perceived the separation of the institutions, their autonomy of functioning, checks and balances, inter-institutional accountability as obstacles to his governing activities. Therefore, those "unbearable" obstacles had to be eliminated.

Without a clear design in mind, Berlusconi vaguely spoke and more often dreamed of institutional reforms in his opinion and several, not only right-wing, analysts', indispensable for strengthening the institutional powers of the Prime Minister. From time to time, he also referred to the need to transform Italy from a parliamentary to a presidential Republic in the questionable belief that the institutional powers available to presidential leaders are automatically and under all conditions greater than those of any parliamentary leader. What Berlusconi wanted was the full translation of his electoral and political power into as much institutional power. Finally, in 2005, his parliamentary majority approved the reform of 56 articles of the Constitution out of 138, but a popular referendum repealed what amounted to a confusing and confused project of a so-called neo-parliamentary republic.

What seems not to be clearly understood by the protagonists of the incessant Italian debate on constitutional reforms, especially those concerning the powers of the Prime Minister, is that only a politically strong leader of the victorious party/coalition will become an institutionally powerful Prime Minister. The weakness of all Italian parties, Berlusconi's included, and, consequently of all litigious governing coalitions, is fully responsible for preventing Italian heads of government from being as powerful as the British Prime Minister, the German Chancellor, the Spanish President of the Government.

Cultural and historical legacies have exercised and continue exercising a significant impact upon the lack of inclination to accept strong political and institutional leaders. However, the experience of both the first and the second phase of the Italian Republic seems strongly to suggest that the parties are the main culprit for their inability to produce

strong leaders. Paradoxically, by so doing they may prove to be quite representative of the preferences and of the tendencies of Italian society. In retrospect one can say that the most prominent leader in post-1945 Italy was a successful "capitalist": the owner of the FIAT company, Gianni Agnelli (1921-2003). By all means he was considered a sort of king and his extended family acquired all the features of a royal family (several scandals included).

Appointed Senator for life in 1991 because of his entrepreneurial merits, Agnelli heavily influenced Italian politics and the public policies of many Italian governments. There have been other successful Italian entrepreneurs, but all of them, to the exception of Silvio Berlusconi, have kept a low profile and have shunned any type of personal participation in politics. None of them has ever attempted to be a role model nor to transfer his (again, only male entrepreneurs) assets into the realm of politics. All this said, I must add that the Italian party landscape is also populated by a host of personalistic parties whose leaders appear "strong" only with reference to their rather small and volatile organizations. In any case, their kind of leadership seems just to suggest the existence of contradictions especially within the political culture of the left that is in principle hostile to strong leaders, but in practice it is available out of unabashed expediency to accept even populist leaders of dubious qualities.

A footnote is in order to throw indirect light on the lack of strong leaders in Italian politics. As already indicated, Silvio Berlusconi represents for better and worse the only exception for the entire period 1994-2011, when he was obliged to resign from office. Throughout this period, Italy has been the only democratic political system in which non-political governments were formed. There have been three of them. The first one (April 1993-March 1994) was led by the Governor of the Bank of Italy, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, later to become President of the Republic (1999-2006). The second one (January 1995-March 1996) was led by Lamberto Dini, who had a long career at the International Monetary Fund and had been Minister of the Treasury in Berlusconi's first government. The third incumbent government (*Governo dei tecnici*, technocrats) has been entrusted November 11, 2011, by the President of the Republic Giorgio Napolitano to Mario Monti, Professor of Economics and former European Commissioner, who had been made Senator for life few days before his appointment. Monti's government is entirely made of non-parliamentarians, having, a couple of exceptions aside, no previous party affiliation. It constitutes the most flagrant repudiation of political and party leaders

as well as a crystal-clear indictment of their lack of prestige, popularity and capabilities.

Mario Monti's government is a response under conditions of emergency to the conjunction of (conjunctural) challenges affecting all the economic systems in the Eurozone. It is too early to say whether Prime Minister Monti will demonstrate major leadership qualities. What can be stated with some assurance is that Italian parties seem both unable and unwilling to reform the institutional framework in such a way to create the conditions for open, transparent, and decisive competition for political offices. Where a war of movements might be the sine qua non condition for the emergence of new and true political leaders, Italian parties and, not surprisingly, their secretaries and ruling groups insist in fighting a war of attrition in which there will be few minor losers and no true decisive winners.

4. Quality of Democracy

In itself, the topic of the quality of Italian democracy would deserve a book-long treatment (I have made some steps in that direction in Pasquino 2002). Here I will deal with it from the perspective of the contributions, or lack of them, made by Italian political and institutional leaders. There are different ways to approach the analysis of the quality of democracy and many, perhaps too many, indicators have been suggested and used. Though the Human Development Index captures what is really important in a political system, in practice it measures more effectively the status and the long-time performance of the different political systems as such. The analysts will see that almost all democracies show a better HDI than almost all non democratic regimes, but the quality of a democracy cannot be equated with its socio-economic performance. Still, we have a reasonable expectation that a democracy of good quality will perform in the socio-economic realm more than satisfactorily, but here we want to assess, as I said, as precisely as possible, the contributions of the leaders to the quality of Italian democracy. I believe that the best theoretical framework for the analysis of a political system remains the one long time ago sketched by David Easton (1965) focused on three fundamental components: authorities, regime, political community.

I will leave aside the political community, but it is important not to forget that Umberto Bossi, the leader of the Northern League, has constructed all his politics on the mobilization of one part of the politi-

cal community, the Northern macro-region called Padania, against the rest of Italy and especially against Roma ladrona (big thief Rome). The second important point to stress is that some political leaders, especially Berlusconi, have repeatedly pointed out that their optimal performance is made difficult, distorted, curtailed, blocked by the rules, the procedures, the institutions, that is the regime, of the allegedly obsolete Italian Republic. All this said and seriously taken into account, my attention will be devoted to the relationship between the authorities, that is, the political and institutional leaders, and the quality of Italian democracy. I will pose a very simple question concerning their behavior. Have Italian political and institutional leaders worked to increase and improve: a) the power of the voters; b) the rule of law; and, c) political accountability?

My overall idea behind the choice of these indicators is that the quality of a democracy depends on the relationship between citizens, institutions, authorities.

The power of the voters. At the end of the first phase of the Italian Republic, two types of political discontent made their strong appearance. On the one hand, many citizens and several politicians were largely dissatisfied with the existing electoral proportional system because it was making difficult, well-nigh impossible, any rotation in government. The lack of governmental alternation was producing a large number of negative consequences, among which political corruption was the most devastating. On the other hand, PR was also preventing the circulation of the political elites: old faces, old alliances and old policies. Through a couple of referendums held in 1991 and 1993, PR was defeated and replaced by a plurality system that still allowed the election of one fourth of the parliamentarians through a proportional formula. The new electoral system was instrumental in producing the collapse of the old party system, the transformation of several parties and the appearance of new ones, and the irruption of Berlusconi into the political scene, but many seasoned politicians proved quite resilient and survived even electoral competition in single-member constituencies. Also, many of those politicians never really accepted and adjusted themselves to the new electoral system, always repeating their preference for re-instating PR. On the contrary, in a couple of failed referendums (1999; 2000), the voters attempted to make the new electoral system fully of the plurality type.

It was the coalition led by Berlusconi that in 2005 produced a new electoral proportional system with a majority bonus aiming at one overriding goal: to reduce the dimensions of the, according to all surveys, likely

victory of the center-left coalition at the same time containing the size of the defeat of the center-right. In fact, the new law performed almost exactly as Berlusconi had hoped. The center-left won a razor-thin victory and its government led a miserable life lasting less than two years. The center-right remained a viable, bellicose opposition. There is an especially lamentable feature in the 2005 law. All Italian voters can do is to trace a cross on the symbol of the party they prefer. Not only are party lists blocked, they are quite long (more than twenty parliamentarians to be elected in each constituency) and the law allows the candidates to be present in all the constituencies. Indeed, Berlusconi was head of his party list in all the constituencies. The ranking order of the candidates is, of course, established by each party which means that, in practice, party and faction leaders decide who will be elected to Parliament obtaining (or exacting) in exchange personal loyalty, party discipline, political subservience. And most parliamentarians have demonstrated without any shame that their so-called loyalty goes first and foremost to the leaders who have selected them and, above all, who retain the power to re-select them rather than to their "unknown" voters with whom they could not establish any kind of relationship. The 2005 law, dubbed Porcellum (Big Pig) was challenged by a request of a popular referendum that was blocked in January 2012 by the Constitutional Court not much to the chagrin of party leaders. The ongoing debate on what for some of the political leaders is a democratic imperative, that is, a new electoral law, does not revolve around the power of the people, but is concerned with short-term partisan advantages and disadvantages. Occasional references to the power of the people are just more or less well disguised attempts at window-dressing the power of party leaders.

Not only have party and institutional leaders characterized themselves for their unwillingness to formulate a decent electoral law giving power to the voters. They have also constantly tried to make it difficult for Italian citizens to call referendums on a variety of issues. Moreover, when the citizens were successful in collecting the necessary 500 thousand signatures and in overcoming the high hurdle represented by the admission judgment of the Constitutional Court, party leaders have attempted to make the referendum void, often successfully, by inviting the voters not to go to the polls. If the turnout is less than 50 per cent, the results of the referendum do not count. This has usually been the strategy pursued mainly by the center-right, better capable to demobilize than to mobilize its voters. Both center-right and the center-left have disregarded the outcome of some referendums, especially those preventing state financing

of political parties and abolishing some Ministries. Finally, though paying a limited lip service to the importance of the instruments of people's participation and direct involvement in the process of decision-making, Italian party leaders and politicians of all shades have been discussing how to make more difficult the procedures through which a referendum can be called, for instance, by significantly increasing the number of signatures to be collected.

In the light of what I have said, and the examples could be easily multiplied, I feel much confident in stressing that Italian political leaders do not appear especially interested in giving more power to the voters. We know that the roots of anti-politics are very deep in Italy. However, the most recent explosion of disaffection with politics has most certainly been fed by the politicians' indifference, deafness, and total disinterest for what Italian citizens have tried to express and communicate with their votes and non votes and through their attempt to call referendums. The emergence and success of a political movement against the established politicians and their style can therefore be easily understood and explained. In a way, the widespread discontent is meant to denounce the poor quality of Italian democracy, but it also reveals that there is some citizens' resilience and that there exist some antibodies.

The quality of a democracy also depends on its institutions and on their complex web of relationships: checks and balances. The discussion on the respective merits and perils of *parliamentarism vs presidentialism* is certainly important, but in Italy it has been conducted in a confused and largely partisan way. Here I will set it aside and will more simply attempt to assess whether Italian leaders have made the most in abiding by the rule of law and in respecting the autonomy of the institutions. For several reasons that I have already touched upon, since 1994 center-left leaders have never been powerful enough to try to use their government to control parliament and to interfere with the autonomy and the working of the judiciary. Their overall strategy has consisted, whenever possible, in designating and appointing loyal personalities, often former politicians, to positions of some significance, for instance the Constitutional Court and many "independent" Authorities, but above all the RAI-TV Broadcasting agency. This is not a recent phenomenon. What is called *lottizzazione* (that implies more than patronage) has been the practice of all Italian governments and parties. It was one way Italian parties enhanced their presence, increased their socio-economic power and, though in a fragile way, enlarged their electoral consensus.

Berlusconi's frequent statements that he has received a popular mandate (which is debatable) and that he was elected by the voters (which is neither true nor possible in the Italian parliamentary democracy) were meant to stress that his government has won the right to do everything. According to Berlusconi and his collaborators, Parliament and the judiciary would behave in a non-democratic way if they attempt to control what the government does and whether its laws and decrees violate or not the existing Constitution. As to Parliament, in order to put a remedy to his own parliamentarians' high level of absenteeism, Berlusconi even hinted at allowing the parliamentary whips to cast the vote for their entire parliamentary group. He has repeatedly attempted to tame the power of the judiciary/judges and to make more difficult their investigative activities. Several of his controversial laws have led to clashes with the President of the Republic and have often been declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court. Berlusconi's declarations, accusations, and behavior have also strongly contributed to the undermining of the confidence in the judiciary and to the politicization of the judges. In sum, ambitious, powerful, willing to make decisions and eager to see results, Berlusconi has repeatedly clashed with all Italian institutions: the Presidency of the Republic, the Constitutional Court, the judiciary as a whole, Parliament as such.

In the end, from a purely political point of view the quality of a democracy depends on the accountability of its political and institutional leaders. The leaders must be aware that their decisions and non-decisions will be evaluated by the voters and rewarded or punished. The design of the electoral and institutional mechanisms and structures is more or less conducive to all kinds of accountability. It can also be positively or negatively manipulated by political and institutional leaders. For a variety of reasons, from the very beginning of the Italian democratic Republic accountability was not the democratic virtue most practiced by the country's leaders. Though still existing and theoretically available, the power of the voters was significantly curtailed. Penetrated as they were by the political parties, Italian institutions enjoyed limited autonomy and were bent to the pursuing of party goals. The complex interplay of political parties and institutions made it quite difficult to operate and implement significant procedures of accountability. Sartori (1976) has suggested that buckpassing had effectively replaced accountability. In several instances, knowing that they could not be called upon to implement what they had promised party leaders were quite willing to resort to *outbidding* their competitors.

Among the many examples in which accountability was in question I have chosen two important instances. In 1985 when a referendum had been called to repeal a law on the indexation system he had badly fought for, then Prime Minister Craxi played the card of accountability. He solemnly declared that one minute after the voters had repealed his law he would resign. Many analysts have stressed that Craxi's commitment won him the votes of many Italians who were contrary to a governmental crisis in the dark, feared yet another period of political instability and decide to reward both the law and his sponsor. About twenty years later Berlusconi did not follow on his promise not to run again had his governmental performance not met the standards he himself had set. While we cannot know whether Craxi would have effectively resigned, there is no doubt that Berlusconi refused to abide by the rules of accountability. When and where the political and institutional leaders are not and do not want to be accountable, the quality of democracy is seriously impaired. And there is no doubt that this is the case of Italy.

5. Conclusive assessment

In this paper we have seen that there are powerful historical and cultural legacies preventing the emergence of strong leaders in Italian politics. We have also seen that, for different reasons, both the parties that dominated the first long phase of the Italian Republic, that is, the Christian Democrats and the Communists, were and remained hostile to the appearance of strong political and institutional leaders. This hostility had already found its way into the Italian Constitution where the powers of the head of government were purposefully designed to be limited in order to prevent the return of a "tyrant". In any case, Italian political culture is imbued with two anti-leader ingredients. On the one hand, there is a profound distrust of politics as a whole and of all politicians. On the other hand, since the politicians are not considered capable of solving problems, but are themselves a major part of the problem, there is no request for strong leaders. As a matter of fact, while some populist leaders have made their appearance, especially in the second phase of the Republic after 1994, neither Bossi nor Berlusconi can be considered strong leaders. Neither has been capable of making significant decisions, of reforming Italian institutions, and of changing the course of Italian politics.

The lack of strong leaders depends very much on the processes of recruitment and selection, of competition and promotion of those who

choose politics as their professional activity. Its dignity being denied by most social groups, in Italy politics is considered and has become nothing more than a bureaucratic career offering nevertheless significant and secure privileges. Most certainly it has not attracted a fair amount of innovative and ambitious individuals.

If leadership is defined as the ability to achieve collective goals; to improve the socio-economic conditions of a community; to mobilize the energies of a specific community, then Italian politics and society are undergoing a serious crisis of leadership. If the true and most difficult test of the statesmen consists in evaluating their legacy: "have they improved the functioning of the political system and have they left the Republic in a better state than when they acquired political power?", then, perhaps, only Alcide De Gasperi can legitimately claim the recognition of statesmanship.

In the end, it appears that the poor quality of Italian democracy also depends on its inability to give birth to capable political leaders and to construct the institutional framework in which they will put to work their leadership qualities becoming accountable for what they do, they do not do, and they do in a bad way.

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