

Editorial

Changing Dynamics in Italian Politics

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The closing months of 2009 witnessed a number of celebrations of the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall. Various analysts have pointed out that the event not only altered the system of international relations but also brought significant changes to domestic politics in various countries. Of these, Italy is the European state whose domestic politics were arguably affected the most profoundly by the change, aside from the former communist states themselves, and the present issue of the *Bulletin* is designed to consider the implications of this. First and foremost, the end of the Cold War had, as is well known, revolutionary consequences for the nature of the country's party system – hardly surprisingly, perhaps, given that the second largest party and the main party of opposition was the strongest communist party in western Europe. The transformation of the then Italian Communist Party into the Democratic Party of the Left and the subsequent transition to the Democratic Party (PD) is analysed by both Phil Edwards and Davide Vampa. On the one hand, Vampa claims that this evolution has resulted in a loss of identity by the moderate left – similar to what is happening in other European countries – and the death of social democracy more generally. On the other hand, Edwards discusses the different souls of the left in Italy, the impact of the PD's decision to run alone in the 2008 elections, and the implications of the change of leadership from Veltroni (and Franceschini) to Bersani.

Changes equally as profound have been wrought by the end of the Cold War on the nature of Italian foreign policy, which has not only acquired a higher profile in public debate but has given Italy more freedom to pursue its interests as well as more responsibilities. Again, this is very well known. However, what Jason Davidson's article on Italian-US relations does is to show how 'prestige' is the key variable necessary to understand Italy's positions in a number of international conflicts, from the 1990 Gulf War to the 2003 Iraq war.

A few years after the end of the Cold War, the principal *consequences* of these revolutionary changes began to make themselves felt. Of these, least two have arguably defied expectations. In the first place, since the *Tangentopoli* investigations played such a central role in the transformation of the party system, the assumption of many was that there would be some more-or-less considerable improvement in the quality of public ethics in Italy – and yet, as Alberto Vannucci points out, revelations of widespread corruption quickly faded as a major issue on the agenda of Italian politics. Consequently, the legacy of '*mani pulite*' has been not only that political corruption is still

systemic in Italy – partly due to the failure of anti-corruption policies – but also that it has actually generated an ever-growing number of tensions between major political actors and the judiciary. In the second place, while it is not surprising therefore that the ordinary citizen has lost any affection for politics – though he/she is now critical '*pour cause*' – what *is* interesting is precisely the conclusion Alfio Mastropaolo draws from his analysis, namely, that this discontent does not seem to have had a significant effect on electoral outcomes.

Where effects *have* been significant is in terms of the impact of the transition from First to Second Republic on executive-legislative relations – discussed by Amie Kreppel. She shows how starting from the 1990s the executive has increasingly been able to have access to the parliamentary agenda and to legislate free from formal parliamentary control. Similar conclusions are reached by Francesco Marangoni. True, there has been a rationalisation of legislative activity by all recent Italian executives, but in the case of the fourth Berlusconi government this has been at the cost of the ordinary legislative process, by over-relying on exceptional procedures, such as decree laws and confidence votes.

We could perhaps sum all this up by saying that the leitmotiv of Italian politics in the post-Cold War era, seems in many respects to have been the search for more balanced, 'equal' relations – between parties and citizens; Italy and the US; parliament and executive, and so forth. Greater equality has certainly been the underlying theme when it comes to some of the most significant *policy issues* to have found their way to the top of the agenda as a result of the end of the Cold War – and yet again, the recent period has been one of hopes and expectations defied. Thus, in her account of the conditions of the Roma population, Isabella Clough Marinaro argues that the erosion of Roma's political rights has occurred over the past thirty years, and has involved both centre-right and centre-left governments with xenophobic attitudes having intensified under the current Berlusconi executive. Alessia Donà explains why civil partnerships remains such a divisive issue in Italian politics despite the changing role of the Catholic Church and its loss of the privileged relationship it had, pre-1989, with the permanent party of government. The enduring hold of the idea of the family founded on marriage has rendered the attempt to adopt a law a contentious issue between the two coalitions and within parties belonging to the same coalition (nothing new in Italy!), with the consequence that discrimination against individual citizens has not ceased.

In the case of Italy then, the legacy of 1989 has been very much a mixed one and we believe that the articles contained in this issue provide a number of interesting pointers for an understanding of what has changed and why, what has not changed and why not. In this respect, we hope that compiling this issue we have once again fulfilled what we take to be the remit of this publication, namely, to provide high-quality analysis of the most recent events and trends in the country's politics – thereby filling, for the benefit of journalists, policy-makers and researchers alike, the gap between newspapers and more conventional academic publications.