

## Editorial

# The Long Road to National Unity

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Italy's 150th anniversary celebrations represented an important, at times rhetorical, opportunity not only to reflect on the birth of a state, but also to rethink the issue of national unity. The symposium in this issue touches upon the process that led to the unification of Italy and its aftermath, in particular the divisions between the liberals and the Marxists in interpreting the Risorgimento (Carter), the controversial figure of Giuseppe Garibaldi (Forlenza and Thomassen), the role of the military in fostering a sense of national unity (Wilcox), and the perspectives on nationalism of intellectuals (Piredda and Gori). As summarised by James Walston in the introduction, these papers confirm that, despite the economic and cultural differences, Italy is 'actually much more unified than popular and some scientific wisdom suggest' (p. 219). In fact, *Italianità* and identification with the state (liberal, fascist, republican) are often confused – so much so that a weak sense of national identity is widely considered to be an essential Italian characteristic – but they are not the same thing.

If the symposium deals mainly with the period that runs from Unification to World War II, other articles focus on the post-war era. In this period, the evolution of the Italian political system was characterised by strong divisions between political parties. Interestingly, Simona Piattoni argues that 'the well-known ideological polarisation of Italy may have its roots in this contested reading of its past history' (p. 402). Between 1948 and 1992, citizens were more loyal to the two political parties – the Christian Democrats and the Communist Party – than to the state or even the nation. Territorial integrity was never questioned, but this did not mean that the country was fully unified. No-one, as Sergio Fabbrini points out, has explained this issue better than Robert Putnam. The concept of social capital, which has been very influential in the social sciences, came to prominence thanks to Putnam's study of the Italian regions. In particular, Putnam showed that the contrasting performances of regions were due less to the structuring of their institutions, than to the social context in which they operated. The presence or lack of mutual trust among their citizens made regions more or less efficient, respectively, in the centre-north and in

the south – and of course these conclusions have generated a heated debate in the academic community.

This gap between different parts of Italy has become a structural feature of the country, governments having done little to solve the problem. For instance, Marangoni shows that the Fourth Berlusconi government placed much more emphasis on the issue of security and justice than on promoting economic development and bridging the north-south divide. In fact, the attempt to promote federalism – with the aim of appeasing the Northern League – risked further accentuating the differences between different parts of Italy.

More generally, Phil Edwards argues, the Second Republic has been characterised by as a sort of ‘bipolar antagonism’, with one coalition questioning the legitimacy of the other. On the one hand, centre-right governments have promoted *ad personam* legislation designed to shield Berlusconi’s business interests and to protect him from a number of trials – trials which have been considered an attempt to subvert the outcome of general elections. On the other hand, the centre left has accused Berlusconi of undermining the democratic system and reducing political culture to the level of a game show. When its leaders (most recently Valter Veltroni, but before him Massimo D’Alema) have tried to establish principled cooperation with Berlusconi and isolate anti-system components the outcome has proved disastrous.

The period of turbulence on the centre right which resulted in the premature end of the Berlusconi premiership in November 2011 was matched by an equal process of restructuration of the centre left, as shown by Marco Damiani. The Democratic Party, which found it difficult to come to terms with failure in the 2008 elections, has been considering its alliance strategy in view of the 2013 elections. One of the major threats, or opportunities, seems to be the emergence of the Vendola phenomenon – which has received enormous support not only in opinion polls but also in a number of local elections (like Milan, Cagliari, Naples).

It is in this climate of uncertainty that President Giorgio Napolitano chose Mario Monti as Prime Minister to replace Berlusconi. The choice of Monti – whose new cabinet is composed of university professors and experienced practitioners – had precedents. There had been other technocratic governments – most notably the ones headed by Carlo Azeglio Ciampi in 1992-93 and Lamberto Dini in 1995-96 – in the past. This time, however, the Government received the support of all forces present in Parliament, with the exception of the Northern League. The economic challenges ahead of Monti are gigantic but the political parties have understood that in order successfully to face the challenges they have no other option than to unite their forces. In this way they have perhaps confirmed the earlier point that national unity is more deeply rooted than widely assumed.