# ITALY: FROM CONSTRAINED COALITIONS TO ALTERNATING GOVERNMENTS?*[1]

*Luca Verzichelli and Maurizio Cotta*



## *1. Introduction : party system features*

The making of governments in Italy after the Second World War, and this has ordinarily meant coalition governments, has been very visibly affected by the special and lasting features of a "polarised multipartism" (Sartori 1976). Only recently the breakdown of that system has opened the door to a new and unexplored territory (Bartolini & D'Alimonte eds. 1995, Cotta & Isernia eds. 1996). To be more accurate, Italian democratic experience after the fall of fascism can be broken down in three periods: two transitional periods and a longer period of "normality". The first transitional period (1944-47) immediately followed the fall of fascism and has been dominated by the problems of democratic instauration. The second transitional period, the duration of which is still uncertain, begins with 1992 and the crisis of the traditional governing parties. Between the two transitional periods there was a relatively long period characterised by stable conditions which have governed in a fairly predictable way the making of coalition governments.

### *a. The period of Anti-Fascist Coalitions.*

1. * This article is the extended version of a paper presented at the Conference *Coalition Governance in Europe,* University of Wien, March, 1 - 3 1996. The German transaltion of the paper will appear in a book edited by Wolfgang Müller e Kaare Strøm. Maurizio Cotta is particularly responsable for paragraphs 1,2 and 6, while Luca Verzichelli for 3, 4 and 5 and for the data collection.

The first transitional period was that of the "anti-Fascist" coalitions. The very special conditions of that time go a long way towards explaining the type of coalition adopted. Opposition to the past regime and to the German occupation of part of the country (which had followed the fall of Mussolini in 1943 and the Italian reversal of international alliances) plus a common interest among the parties to win back the control over the making of the new democracy from the monarchy and the occupying armies, the lack of a dominant party and the need to write a new constitution were the factors that made a grand coalition of all the six original parties[2] desirable and at the same time possible (Pasquino 1986).

The cabinets formed before the first democratic elections (1946) were based on equal representation of all the six parties of the coalition. The original assumption of equal weight of all the parties could not last however for very long. The pivotal position of Christian Democracy between Left and Right gave this party already at the end of 1945 the opportunity to win the very important and visible position of Prime Minister. The elections of 1946 for the Constituent Assembly established without doubts the greater strength of three parties (Communists, Socialists and Christian democrats) vis à vis all the others. This fact plus the birth of new parties outside the Anti-fascist coalition (especially on the Right of the political spectrum with the Monarchists, the rightist populists of the *Uomo Qualunque* and the neo-fascists of the *Movimento Sociale Italiano*) initiated the crisis of the coalition. The first party to leave it was the Liberal party; and soon the three main parties were left to govern alone. The next step was the break among the latter ones.

The political isolation of the MSI, the party representing the continuity with the past regime was a lasting legacy of this period. It will be overcome only in 1994 and after the transformation of MSI into a new party (*Alleanza Nazionale*).

*b. The great divide: parties of government and parties of opposition.*

The breakdown of the Anti-Fascist coalition was definitively sealed by the great confrontation brought about by the Cold War and by the ensuing

2. The six original parties were from Left to Right: the Communist Party (PCI), the Socialist Party (PSIUP, later PSI), the liberal-socialist Action Party (PdA), the Christian Democracy (DC), the moderate Labour Democracy (DdL), and the rightist Liberal Party (PLI).

linkage between international and internal conflict. As a result the elections of 1948 acquired a constituent meaning for the Italian political system. They were fought as a battle between two unreconcilable camps, between "pro-system" (where "system" meant the West, competitive democracy, market economy, etc.) and "anti-system" forces. The victory of one side (the pro-western side) meant that the other side was since then confined to a permanent opposition. The "political battle" of 1948 had a further consequence. It produced a very significant strengthening of the leading parties of the two camps (Christian democrats on one side; Communists on the other). Intermediate forces were squeezed between the two giants and lost weight. The political identities of the two major parties were as a result heavily influenced by the cleavage that was to a large extent responsible for their success . The success had been obviously greater for the DC which was on the winning side; but it had been significant also for the PCI which had lost the battle for the government but won that for the leadership of the Left. The incentives to replicate in the following years the political "pièce" that had proved so successful in 1948 were so strong that the communist/anti-communist divide will dominate the long political cycle lasting from 1948 to 1992.

From 1948 to 1992 the configuration of the party system has remained fairly stable. Seven parties (PCI, PSI, PSDI, PRI, DC, PLI, MSI) with a relatively stable weight have existed throughout this period. A few more small parties have appeared and disappeared mainly as a result of splits and fusions. These parties were commonly perceived along a left-right dimension where the PCI was at the extreme left and the MSI at the extreme right. The current perception of the location of parties was not strictly based on an economic dimension since according to this the MSI would have been to the left of the Liberal party and perhaps also of the Republican party. The communist/anti-communist dimension was undoubtedly a major component of this perception. In the central area of the party system the existence of a big party, the DC, stretching with its left and right wings over a broad political space makes it a bit difficult to decide the relative location of some of the small parties (like the Republicans and Social-democrats). Their position would be in most policy fields (except on religious related issues) "inside" the space covered by the DC.

The government making process has worked during this period under very strict political constraints which have seriously limited the *koalitionsfaehigkeit* of the parties. The MSI to the right and the Communist Party to

the left were systematically excluded from governments. Attempts to overcome this condition have indeed taken place, as it is shown by a few cases when these parties provided external support for the government (the MSI in the late 50s, the PCI in the late 70s). But such attempts never had a lasting success and the two parties reverted to their position of permanent opposition. Only the deep crisis of the governing parties in the 90s will produce the favourable conditions that will enable the two (transformed) parties to become full players in the governmental game.

Within this long political cycle shorter cycles have developed which can be identified with changing coalitional formulae. While the lasting features of the party system and of the long political cycle have had very much to do with the original polarisation between the two largest parties and with the pro-system/anti-system cleavage, shorter term changes have rather been influenced from variations in the strength and strategies of the other parties.

The existence of a relatively high number of small parties in the central area of the political spectrum has been a typical characteristic of the Italian party system during this period. The fairly low threshold of parliamentary representation provided by a rather proportional electoral system (particularly in the case of the larger *Camera dei Deputati*), and the persistence of a number of traditional political cleavages which could not be completely erased by or included in the communist/anti-communist divide, are the main factors explaining this feature of the party system. Except for the elections of 1948 the Christian Democratic party has never been able to win a parliamentary majority, and although by far the largest party of the anti-Communist camp it has always been in need of building a coalition with some of those smaller parties. As a result the anti-Communist (governing) camp has always included both socialist and bourgeois parties, anti-clerical and clerical parties, etc..

Within the confining conditions of the "long cycle" the coalition game has been affected by three main factors: 1. the competition among parties of the anti-Communist camp; 2. factional competition within the DC; 3. interconnections between the two levels of competition.

The DC being at the center of the governing camp has had to face competition from the left and from the right and has generally attempted to reduce the effects of this situation by incorporating parties of both sides within the coalition. Center-Left and Center-Right parties have typically had an opposite interest. In order to be in a better situation to face com-

petitors further to their left or to their right they have generally strived to give to the coalition either a more clearly Leftist or a more clearly Rightist orientation. The Socialist party, once it had moved in the governing camp after having broken its earlier close alliance with the PCI, had to protect itself against competition from the Communists. The Liberal party against competition from the Monarchists and Neo-Fascists. To further complicate things there has been always a very significant degree of competition among the three parties of the Centre-Left (Socialists, Social-Democrats and Republicans) for the limited political space available between the two giants (PCI and DC). Finally the internal competition within the DC has often meant that different factions would push (for ideological and policy reasons) in the direction of conflicting alliances.

This complicated political game of coalition-building has produced a number of short term political cycles characterised by the predominance of one coalitional formula. The main difference among formulae (except for the third one) has been the inclusion or exclusion of one or the other of the smaller parties. The short cycles are the following ones (see 1):

1. Centrism (*centrismo*)
2. Centre-left coalition (*centro-sinistra*)
3. National solidarity (*solidarietà nazionale*)
4. Five-party coalition (*pentapartito*)

These political cycles have typically had a preparatory phase during which the new formula was experimented, often without the full engagement of all the political partners, a central period of relatively more lasting cabinets, and a period of decline characterised by growing instability, shorter cabinets, the disengagement of some of the partners, attempts to re-negotiate the alliance, etc (Marradi 1982). During most of these cycles an intermediate crisis has taken place, but after a period of instability a second stabilisation has been possible. Only in the case of National Solidarity a new stabilisation after the first crisis was not possible. This was in any case the most unusual of the coalition cycles; in fact the attempt to involve the Communist party in the government clashed against the constraints of the long term political cycle which had not yet lost all their strength.

The internal dynamics of coalition cycles follow a recurrent pattern. They should have therefore a common explanation. "From great hopes (and promises) to disillusionment" is probably the formula that best captures the reasons for this pattern. At the beginning of each coalition cycle there is always a fairly significant (or at least so it is perceived by the poli-

tical actors of that time) redefinition of the ideological and/or policy image of one or more parties within or outside the previous coalition pattern. Such a redefinition aims at placing that party in a better position to fight the electoral competition and also to play the coalition game (there are obviously important connections between the two games). A more clearly defined political profile of the DC and of the splinter Social-Democrats was the crucial factor at the beginning of the Centrist period, the move toward the centre of the Socialist party played the same role for the Centre-left and again for the Five-party coalition, the increasing moderation of the PCI for the National Solidarity period. The new political profile of one or more parties enables the finding of a common ground among the new coalition partners and therefore facilitates agreements concerning a number of possible policy initiatives. The beginning of a new coalition formula typically heralds a period of "reforms" (which are proclaimed in the programs of the new governments). But the road from promises and hopes to concrete legislation and to its implementation proves generally much more difficult than expected. The cumbersome and heterogeneous nature of coalitions with many partners often internally divided is one of the foremost among the reasons of government troubles. It is true that while significant reforms are difficult to be agreed upon, more down to earth distributive policies and patronage are more easily accessible and can to some extent compensate for the failures at the higher level (Cotta 1996; Cotta and Verzichelli 1996). But in the end the political gains derived from the coalition game are generally lower than expected. Only very rarely there is a net electoral gain for the whole coalition; moreover there is always one (or more than one) party which has not profited and is unhappy with the coalition. It is not a case that with few exceptions only short lived, transitional cabinets are put in place after the elections. The parties of the coalition require some time before they are able to digest the electoral results. "Summer holidays governments" (elections in Italy typically take place at the end of the spring), which generally do not enjoy the full support of all the coalitions partners, take care of current affairs until the parties are able to reach a more stable agreement.

The lack of electoral success, difficulties encountered in reaching agreements on significant policy issues, and increasing distributive conflicts progressively induce one or more of the coalition partners to take a more rigid stance vis à vis the others. In order to face external competition some parties find it more politically profitable to shift to a less clear position of

external support or of abstention. After some time there may be a renewal of the same coalitional formula, maybe on the basis of a re-negotiated agreement and of a re-equilibration of the roles of the coalition partners. Otherwise the coalition will draw to an end and the opening of a new political scenario will follow.

*c. The transition of the 90s. Adieu to the First Republic or what ?*

Between '92 and '94 the crisis of the political system of the First Republic unravels at great speed. Among the many facets of the crisis, which cannot be discussed here in details (Cotta & Isernia 1996), a crucial aspect is undoubtedly the crisis of the old party system and more specifically of its "centre". A mutually reinforcing combination of electoral losses, judicial prosecutions on grounds of misuse of public money, party splits, plus the effects of a new electoral system very quickly brings the traditional governing parties on their knees while new parties or the old excluded ones are able to win a significant part of the political space that the centre parties had controlled with great success for well over 40 years (Morlino 1996). The implosion of the centre of the party system coincides with the end of the double exclusion of the communist left and of the extreme right. Suddenly all the parties have gained a reasonable expectation to win access to the government.

The incredible speed of the crisis of the old governing parties and of the political elite they had produced, plus the difficult consolidation of the new parties and even more of the new inter-party relations create a situation which makes for some time the political bases of governments rather unpredictable. After the Amato cabinet which at the start follows more or less the traditional pattern, but gradually gains a greater independence from its supporting parties, a more clearly "technical government" headed by the former governor of the Bank of Italy, Ciampi, is formed. This cabinet, which in theory was still based upon the parliamentary support of a coalition of the old governing parties, was in reality much more dependent from the Head of State and to an extent even from the old opposition which had chosen the abstention. The election of 1994 seems at first to inaugurate a new situation where one of the competing coalitions of the right and of the left would be in the position to win control of the cabinet as a result of an electoral mandate. But within a few months the Berlusconi government proves that such a situation is still out of reach for the Italian po-

litical system. The winning centre-right coalition breaks down as a result of conflicts between the Northern League and the other major partners (*Forza Italia* and *Alleanza Nazionale*) and a new technical government strongly controlled by the President of the Republic is sworn in. The new government will last for about a year with the parliamentary support of the loosing side of the electoral competition (the Left and the PPI, one of the successor parties of the old DC) plus the Northern League which has switched side, but even from time to time of some smaller parties of the Centre-Right alliance. After the failed attempt in January 1996 to build a grand coalition between Centre-Right and Centre-Left with the purpose of introducing radical institutional changes the parliament is dissolved. The elections of 1996 are fought by two competing coalitions each with a well identifiable leader and candidate for the position of prime minister. This time it is the Centre-Left coalition which wins and faces the challenge of governing. If it will be able to overcome its (far from irrelevant) internal problems the stabilisation of the system along the lines of a bipolar competition might bring to an end the transitional period and inaugurate a new political cycle, otherwise that moment will be further delayed.

*2. Institutional rules*

The Italian Constitution of 1948 has adopted more or less the normal rules of parliamentary democracy. The proposal to introduce a presidential system received only limited support and efforts to strengthen the executive did not go beyond a very limited rationalisation of the motion of no confidence. For an understanding of the actual working of the government building process a strictly formal reading of the legal rules is generally of little help. Their interpretation in the practice is more important.

a. *Nomination of the government*. The power to nominate the Prime Minister is given to the President of the Republic (art. 92). In practice the choice of the PM was done until 1992 on the basis of the suggestions coming from the parties which had agreed to form a coalition or from the DC in the case of single party cabinets. However, given the complicated process of coalition making, the Head of State has been able to gain in some occasions a certain degree of influence over the choice of the Prime Minister and even over some other aspects of the coalition. In general Heads of State belonging to one of the smaller parties have attempted to strengthen the chances for their party to participate in the coalition. Christian Democratic Presi-

dents have sometimes taken part in the factional games inside their own party.

The prime minister chooses the ministers who are then nominated by the President of the Republic (art. 92). In practice the nomination of ministers has been done on the basis of indications provided by each party of the coalition or by the internal factions in the case of parties where they are important (as in the case of the DC). The Prime Minister really chooses the ministers (but only those assigned to his party or faction) only when he is the leader of his party or of his faction. Otherwise his role will not be very different from that of other party influentials. Prime Ministers of technical governments have probably had a somewhat greater influence in the selection process. In these cases the Head of State has also played a very strong role.

The number of ministers in not fixed. While in order to establish a new ministerial department a law is needed, ministers without portfolio can be easily created.

Once the composition of the government has been decided the government is sworn in front of the President of the Republic. The choice of the under-secretaries takes place in the first meeting of the cabinet following the same informal rules as for the ministers.

b. *Parliamentary vote of confidence.* According to the Constitution the government has to receive a positive vote of confidence by both chambers. An absolute majority of the members attending is required. The standing orders of the Chamber of Deputies count abstentions as favourable votes. The standing orders of the Senate count them as negative votes. In the Senate parties or individual senators which do not want to support the government in an explicit way but want to enable its formation instead of abstaining have to leave the house at the moment of the vote. The voting has to be done by roll call.

Since the two chambers may have different majorities the full bicameralism of the Italian constitution can be seen as a factor encouraging larger than minimal coalitions.

c. *Vote of no confidence.* The vote of no confidence of a single chamber is sufficient to bring down a government. Such a vote can derive from a motion proposed by the opposition (art. 94). Such a motion has to be undersigned by at least one tenth of the members of a chamber and cannot be put to a vote before three days after its presentation. Another possibility can arise when the government itself asks for a positive vote of confidence

from the parliament and fails to achieve a favourable majority. Such an initiative is typically taken within the context of the law-making process or during the approval of the budget for the purpose of disciplining the majority. Even in this case the voting mode is by roll call. Ordinary votes against the government do not entail neither a formal nor an informal obligation to resign.

d. *The impact of electoral rules*. The PR electoral system existing until the reform of 1993 did not provide any incentive for pre-electoral coalitions. In 1952 after an extremely harsh parliamentary battle the majority had been able to pass an electoral law that gave a special "majority bonus" to the party or the coalition that would win the absolute majority of votes creating thus an incentive for pre-electoral coalitions. But in the following elections of 1953 the centrist coalition missed by few votes the threshold of 50%, and the majority bonus was not assigned. Soon afterwards the new electoral system was abolished and the PR system re-established. New proposals more or less along these lines were put forward again in the eighties by the DC and the PCI. The PSI on the contrary proposed the direct election of the President of the Republic. In 1993 following a referendum against the existing electoral system of the Senate the parliament approved a reform of the electoral systems of the two chambers. The new electoral systems of the two chambers although different on a number of other aspects are both mixed: 75% of the seats are allocated through a plurality system in single member constituencies and 25% on the basis of PR (D'Alimonte & Chiaramonte 1995). While the effects of the new electoral systems in reducing the number of parties in parliament have not been substantial they have encouraged the formation of pre-electoral cartels of parties which have presented common candidates in the single member districts (but not for the proportional seats). These cartels have proposed themselves also as potential government coalitions and have designated (implicitly in 1994, more explicitely in 1996) their candidates for the position of prime minister. If this trend continues the government formation process even under unchanged constitutional rules might be altered in a significant way.

### *3. Government Formation*

Data about government formation in Italy have to be discussed keeping in mind a more general point: the variable political weight of cabinets. In

order to understand the characters of the coalitional process, in fact, we must take into account not only how many actors are involved in the bargaining and how many coalitional attempts take place before an agreement is reached, but also the political meaning of each cabinet and the real aim of each attempt.

The formal rules concerning government formation have not changed all along the fifty years of the Republic. In any case the Constitution does not enter too much in the details of the process[3]. According to the customs the process begins with the consultations held by the Head of State who after the former presidents meets the party leaders[4]. At the end, a formateur is officially designated to start the real political negotiations with those parties which seem to be ready to reach an agreement. Some times during this process one of the potential coalitional party refuses to cooperate; there is then a new round of negotiations or even the renunciation of the formateur and a new selection[5]. Once a basic agreement is reached the Prime Minister designate reports the results of his consultations to the President and receives then the official mandate to form a government. Now it is time to define the guidelines of the policy platform and, when a compromise has been reached, he can begin to form the list of the possible ministers.

On the basis of this procedure, it is relatively easy to determine the *number of bargaining attempts* before each new cabinet. Much more difficult is to define exactly how long does it takes to form a new coalition. Sometimes, in fact, a minority or a transitional coalition cabinet has been formed with the only purpose preparing the agreement for a new coalition[6]. Such a cabinet can be viewed as a bargaining attempt of the next full coalition cabi-

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3. Art. $92^2$ simply says "the President of the Republic appoints the President of the Council of Minister and, on the proposal of the latter, the ministers".

4. The party delegations invited by the President represent in theory the parliamentary groups but in fact are lead by the party chairmen. After 1992 the greater role of the President and later the designation by the electoral cartels of their candidates for the position of Prime Minister have reduced the importance of such consultations.

5. In order to solve intricate situation, the President of the Republic may appoint sometimes a personality with a significant institutional background giving him the mandate to verify the existence of the conditions for a new coalition (the so called *exploratory mandates*). These attempts have been coded as new bargaining attempts, even if they do not involve a new formateur, because they are real attempts to change the composition of the coalition.

net. Under this respect we should distinguish different patterns of government formation (full coalitional formation vs. transitional coalition or minority cabinet formation) within the political phases already discussed (see Fig. A and paragraph 1.). It is easy to observe that before every "full" coalition there is at least one provisional coalition or a single party cabinet with a limited mandate. The reason is clear. The birth of a new coalition is always complicated by conflicts among the parties (concerning the reforms asked by the new coalitional partner, and the quota of cabinet posts to be assigned to every actor) and within one or more parties (resistance within the old governmental parties to the enlargement of the coalition, refusal to accept the coalition in some sectors of the new party involved). A transitional cabinet may help solving such problems.

A particularly long process, when one counts both the failed bargaining attempts and even the birth of temporary cabinets, can be observed at the dawn of *centre-left* (1960 - 1963) as well as at the beginning of the *five-party* coalition. And the same happens with the complicated crises during the phases of re-negotiation of a coalition. This was the case under the *centre-left*, but also in the new *five-party coalition* cabinets following the Craxi government and the election of 1987. The formateurs have to find new compromises not only about policy platforms, but also on problems of offices distribution.

On the other hand, when a cabinet falls but a coalitional formula and the policy guidelines it was based upon are still valid, the process of cabinet formation can be faster. In fact it may often imply the confirmation of the former PM and of many ministers. This was the case for De Gasperi during Centrism, for Moro and Rumor during the Centre-left, for Andreotti during the National solidarity and even (but with some more complicated bargaining) for Spadolini and Craxi during the five-party coalition[7].

During the final part of a coalition phase cabinet formation is generally a particularly delicate and problematic process. Conflicting alternatives in terms of coalition composition face each other. The most evident example is the phase from 1958 to 1960 (end of *centrism*) when attempts to create a new coalition with the Socialist party coexisted with an official project to re-consolidate the previous coalition and a more or less evident attempt to

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6. In this sense the *convergenza democratica* cabinets led by Fanfani (1960-63) have to be seen as transitional cabinet toward the new coalitional formula. Something similar can be said about the *governi ponte* of Leone (1963 and 1968) and the Rumor cabinet in 1969.

include the rightist parties in the governmental majority. The normal outcome during a phase of decay of a coalitional formula is the loss of some coalitional actors; a good example are the many *quasi centre-left* cabinets during the seventies, based on the abstention or the external support of some parties, or the *four-party* coalition of 1991 when the PRI left the *pentapartito* ). Even in these cases the bargaining process remains very long, since the PM designate tries first of all to revive the old formula. Then he has to verify the existence of the new coalition and finally he starts the "ordinary" process, which will require a new distribution of ministerial and sub-ministerial posts.

Looking at the outcomes of the government formation procedure in the long term the view suggesting the existence of a set of informal rules for the selection of the ministerial personnel and for the creation of cabinet platforms (Dogan 1989) is confirmed. But the gradual and continuous change of the political landscape over the years has produced some noticeable changes in the role of political and institutional actors. In particular, it is possible to recognise a number of historical points when the transition from an old to a new equilibrium (among parties or inside them) caused a high number of failed attempts or the birth of weak governments (Mehrson 1994). In the perspective of this research, it is easy to see how the simple process of identifying the potential leader of a new coalition was, in Italy , a long and time-consuming process (table 5). Most of the times when a change in the coalitional formula was taking place, there has been at least one failed attempt to form a cabinet. Moreover, the number of parties involved in the bargaining attempts was often variable, because of the strategic behaviour of the small center parties, which could switch from a full co-operative position, to external support, to the abstention during the

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7. Nevertheless, most of the times even when the same PM was reinstated there was some slight difference in the composition of the next cabinet. Only four times two subsequent cabinets had the same leader and exactly the same majority: this was the case for the second and third cabinet led by Moro (1964 and 1966), the second cabinet led by Spadolini (1982) and the second led by Craxi (1986). The numbers of these cabinets follows the official Italian numbering. According to the framework of this research we did not count these cabinets as new ones in our tables. Along these lines the fourth cabinet led by Andreotti (1978) could have been fused with the former one (which was also a single party government); we decided to count it as a different cabinet to stress the importance of the passage from a coalition based on the abstention of Communist party to the full *national solidarity* formula based on the explicit parliamentary support of the PCI.

parliamentary vote of confidence or even to what used to be called "constitutional opposition" (in order to distinguish it from that of the anti-system parties).

But the most evident indicator of difficulty in this process is the duration of the crisis. Generally speaking governmental crises have been quite long, especially if compared with the mean duration of cabinets. The length of governmental crises has increased during the sixties (Battegazzorre 1987) and has been particularly significant before the formation of the cabinets which correspond to a "new" coalitional formula. During the early stages of an alliance, in fact, the game of cabinet formation is particularly slow and "incremental". If reaching an agreement for a full fledged coalition takes too much time a more limited (both in coalition size and programmatic scope) provisional government can be formed while party leaders continue working on the building of a more solid political pact[8].

A qualitative analysis of the history of government formation shows that internal conflicts within the largest governmental party have been a recurrent source of difficulties during coalition building. The equilibrium among the *correnti* of the DC has been always a major concern for the nominators (officially the Head of State, but in practice the party leaders) of a new PM and then for the same PM. On the other hand it must be added that sometimes a coalitional partner could object to the presence, inside the cabinet, of a Christian Democratic minister considered unfriendly to that party, or ask that a given ministry does not fall in the "quota" of a specific faction.

The difficulties arising from the factionalised structure of the largest party typically concern two different aspects: the acceptance of the choice of the new prime minister[9] and the bargaining for the distribution of cabinet positions among the factions. If factions have been particularly important in the DC one should not forget that also the behaviour of other coalitional partners was often influenced by internal conflicts[10].

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8. Sometimes, however, there is no way to solve the crisis with a provisional compromise and, since it is impossible or inconvenient to call a new early election, the crisis drags on without any way of escape (*crisi al buio)*. This was the case of the dramatic crisis after the 1976 election before the first cabinet of *national solidarity*, and in 1979 before the *five-party coalition*.

9. Some evident examples of intra-party conflicts can be seen during the fifties, at the time of the different attempts by Fanfani and during the sixties, with the cabinet led by Tambroni and with the veto to the participation of Scelba in the *Centre-left*.

With the passing of time the causes of failures or delays of the bargaining attempts are increasingly due to the resistance of the smaller parties. It is especially so during the "centre-left" phase when the smaller parties often alternate in participating to the coalition, and the same can be seen at the beginning of the eighties, when the "five-party coalition" formula was forming. The increasing role of non-DC coalitional partners during the government formation bargaining is due to the changes in the political scene. The entrance of a middle sized party as the PSI in the coalition is a first important element in this perspective. To this should be added that during the seventies the DC lost the *pivotal position* in parliament on what we have defined here as the second policy dimension; and during the eighties also on the first one (see table 2). It is particularly with the eighties that a new balance of power in the government coalition became evident: the end of the traditional Christian Democratic monopoly over the position of Prime Minister and a different distribution of ministerial and junior-ministerial positions are the most clear signs of the new situation[11].

With the political earthquake started in 1992, the selection process and also the role of prime ministers begin to change. Giuliano Amato in 1992 was still a "party nominated" candidate[12] but he seemed to enjoy a relatively larger freedom of action in the formation of his cabinet and during the last part of his mandate, the cabinet had lost a good deal of its partyness (Cotta and Verzichelli 1996). And it was even more so with the next government headed by the former governor of the Bank of Italy, Ciampi. The role of the President in choosing the Prime Minister and then, in se-

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10. It is the case of the Socialist party, which was internally divided for a long time on the question of government collaboration with the DC, and, to a lesser extent also of the Social-democratic party. PRI and PLI were traditionally more cohesive parties, and conflicts inside their elites were more easily solved by distributing governmental or subgovernmental positions.

11. In 1982, the number of ministerial posts assigned to DC was for the first time lower than that given to the other coalition partners. From this moment onward the bargaining process between DC and Socialist party came to be a nearly "paritetical" relationship (Verzichelli 1992)

12. After the 1992 elections, the Socialist party had again the chance to obtain the prime ministership. But, the first voices about *Tangentopoli* made the Craxi candidature unacceptable. The delegation of the Socialist group, during the official negotiations with the Head of State, provided three names: De Michelis, Martelli and Amato. The last one, the most autonomous from the old leadership, was accepted by the other parties and probably pushed personally by the President of the Republic himself.

lecting together with the latter the ministers (a great number of which were not politicians) increases very significantly creating a very new pattern of government formation which is to be linked to the serious weakening of the parties. But further important changes are produced by the adoption since 1994 of the new (partially majoritarian) electoral system and by the restructuring of the party system. With the victory by an electoral cartel of parties the candidate for the position of Prime Minister is immediately clear (Berlusconi in 1994, Prodi in 1996). The strong role recently acquired by the President seems bound to be reduced again. The cabinet formation process becomes also much simpler and, without any change in the constitutional procedures, the role of the PM designate during the bargaining process becomes significantly stronger vis à vis that of the other party leaders. This new pattern of government formation is however still far from consolidated. The premature end of the Berlusconi cabinet and the formation of a new technical government (the Dini cabinet of 1995) show that as soon the "electoral" majority is in trouble[13], the fragmented part system dominates again the process of cabinet formation and the president can regain a substantial influence on it.

*4. Coalition governance*

The analysis of cabinet formation in Italy generally supports the traditional view which stresses the dominant weight of office distribution during the process. The share-out of ministries takes usually more time and receives more attention than the definition of policy platforms; the pervasive partyness of government in the field of appointments goes hand in hand with the weakness of policy platforms (Vassallo 1994; Cotta 1996). One should however not go as far as saying that policy issues are irrelevant for coalition making. First of all it is obvious that some "high policies" issues have determined which parties could be part of government coalitions and which not. And an empirical analysis of government programs has shown that a set of policy issues have provided the general guide-lines for coalition making in the post W.W.II. period (Mastropaolo & Slater

13. We do not have the space here for a detailed analysis of the new developments of the Italian party system. Current studies on this show all the difficulties of the re-consolidation of the system, after the rapid de-structuring of the past years (Morlino 1996). The fragmentation remains high, as shown by the effective number of legislative parties (see table 2) and chances of further changes are still possible.

1992). Moreover one should distinguish between coalition phases and individual cabinets. A new coalition phase typically entails a more substantial redefinition of policy platforms than is the case for ordinary individual cabinets. During a coalition phase some broad policy guidelines will remain relatively stable through different cabinets. During the formation of individual cabinets only more specific policy issues will be typically dealt with.

The general model of coalition governance which characterised the Italian experience during the period 1945-1995 can be summarised, at least until the beginning of the current transition (1992), as follows:

1) there has generally been no official written agreement by the parties of the coalition on a common platform for policy making. The formal definition of the government platform was delegated to the Prime Minister designate, who after contacting the party delegations would write the draft text of the government program to be presented in the parliamentary debate. While the text proposed originally from the PM could be relatively detailed, the final result, the governmental program, has usually been rather general and vague (Mastropaolo and Slater 1992, Guagnano 1994). Such a document would not become a strict guide for the policy agenda of the cabinet as, for instance, in the case of Belgium (De Winter 1989). In only two occasions we could ascertain the existence of a formalized, although not officially reported, " party agreement". The first case was at the beginning of the centre-left[14] and the second before the full *national solidarity* cabinet[15].

2) the distribution of offices has followed a proportionalistic model of representation and concerned not only ministerial positions but also Junior ministerships and other sub-governmental offices. The competition for posts would has not been only among parties: the representation of Christian Democratic factions has generally been one the main problems

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14. This document was not recorded in any official document, but it was distributed by the Christian Democratic Party. It included a short political introduction and a policy chapter, mainly devoted to economic problems.

15. We are talking here about the document signed by DC, PCI, PSI, PRI, PSDI and PLI in July 1977. Of course this can not be considered the official agreement for the next cabinet (Andreotti IV), born in March 1978, but a necessary step to reach a full *national solidarity* government. Paradoxically enough, a document developed mainly to limit the political meaning of the cabinet (Christian Democratic executive clearly spoke about a pure policy agreement refusing the label of "coalition pact") is in the end one of the few examples of coalition agreements.

in the formation process and it has been very often the main cause of government termination (see below);

3) Once the quota of ministers or posts for each party or faction had been determined, party and faction leaders have been relatively free to decide the "names". Before the eighties, the nominators of the ministers were, substantially, a restricted party elite which generally remained out of the Cabinet team. Some change in this pattern takes place during the eighties, when party leaders tend increasingly to move inside the cabinet and to cumulate the two positions (Verzichelli 1992). This is particularly evident for the smaller parties, while in the DC competition among faction leaders makes the cumulation of the position of party and cabinet leader more difficult .

4) The birth of a new cabinet did not produce usually expectations of a strong coalition discipline in parliament. This had clearly to do with the nature of the coalition pact. The "normal" situation, from this point of view, has been that of weak and often ambiguous compromises (partly of a negative nature, with the aim of excluding some policies and partly of a positive nature, with the purpose of promoting some others) concerning a number of short term and specific policies (for instance conjunctural measures concerning the economy, state finances, some aspects of the welfare state) and, more rarely, guidelines about more wide-ranging reforms. But in general, we can exclude the existence for each new cabinet of a comprehensive and clearly enforceable policy platform.

The limits of coalition discipline become easily apparent as soon as the law-making process is analysed. The high proportion of government bills that are not passed by parliament (from 40% to 50%), the frequent bargains struck with the opposition and the large number of parliamentary amendments accepted by the government in order to have its bills approved (Di Palma 1877) suggest that the cohesiveness of the majority was far from assured. One could say that the government would generally expect discipline in parliamentary vote on its legislative proposal but could not take it for granted. Whenever the coalition discipline failed the government would have either to accept a defeat or a compromise possibly involving not only the majority but also the opposition. This lack of discipline might not endanger directly the life of the cabinet provided that the PM or some party leaders did not ask explicitly a coherent parliamentary behaviour because of the special political relevance of the issue. In any case in some policy sectors where a clear cleavage divided the governmental area

(for example on issues like private education or divorce and abortion) no coalition discipline could be conceived and the government simply refrained from taking a position.

This general view is more or less applicable to all coalition examples considered here, although, of course, some variations in the degree of discipline may exist. Especially at the beginning and during the "golden age" of each coalitional period (table 1), discipline is stronger. Some of the conflicts may be solved by using an informal mechanism as the coalitional summit, which in any case confirms the need of a continuous bargaining among governing parties (Criscitiello 1994; Hine 1993). Otherwise the coalitional problems may be sometimes solved with a slight change in the ministerial formation[16] or with a short governmental crisis which enables a re-negotiation of some aspects without really endangering the coalition in itself[17]. During the decay of a coalitional formula or the transitional periods the cohesion among allied parties declines and the discipline becomes much more uncertain.

Looking at differences among coalitional phases, a slow but sufficiently evident transformation can be noticed. Data about government composition (tables 3 and 4) show that the typical pattern of the first phase of the Republic (during the fifties and sixties) was based on an incremental inclusion of all the "potential actors" of the coalition (all the governmental parties and all the representative factions of the main party). This process took time and created very often problems for the stability of individual cabinets. The use of external support was a typical temporary solution to ensure a majority during phases of coalition re-negotiation. The result of it was an alternance among "full" cabinets (representing the typical coali-

16. We counted at least ten examples of partial substitution of ministerial personnel which did not affect the structure of the coalition. This procedure, called *rimpasto* (reshuffle), was often used in the past, especially during the centre-left period, for the purpose of pacifying some party influentials (in particular inside DC) or to cover one or more ministerial positions left by ministers of a party faction which had become hostile to the government. In the latter case (for example in the substitution of the ministers of the left DC faction in 1990), the *rimpasto* has the same political meaning of a "normal" crisis.

17. This is the case of some cabinet crises not counted here (those during the government led by Moro in the sixties) or even the crisis of the third Andreotti cabinet, during the age of *solidarietá nazionale*. All those crises were triggered by one or more of the coalition parties with the purpose to re-negotiate the structure of the cabinet and to enforce the policy agenda of the executive.

tion of each phase) and transitional cabinets (either single party-minority cabinets or cabinets based upon incomplete coalitions).

During the second half of the seventies and the eighties cabinet stability increased slightly (Battegazzorre 1987) and since then a number of small reforms attempted to strengthen the institutional role of the executive and of the Prime Minister. In particular after the end of the phase of the "national solidarity", which was based on a parliamentary grand coalition, the new governmental coalition tried to bring the effective decision making back in the hands of the Cabinet. The effects of these attempts were at best ambiguous. An empirical study about the functioning of a typical feature of the last two decades, the "majority summits"[18], shows for instance that this instrument had a mixed effect: on one side it strengthened the executive (by providing an instrument to reach decisions), on the other side it constrained the autonomy of its central institution (by bringing outside the cabinet some of the crucial decisions) (Criscitiello 1994).

To say that the traditional government formation process was dominated by the problem of office distribution does not mean that the parties were not interested in the policy areas pertaining to different ministries. On the contrary, the persistent control by the same party (and particularly by the largest coalition party) over some crucial ministerial positions and the intense struggle for a number of the other ones are the proof of the importance tributed by parties and factions to the control over specific fields of policy and patronage[19]: while a very high level of circulation generally prevailed a more limited *inner circle* of relatively long lasting ministers assured a somewhat more stable pattern of governance in some crucial ministries[20] .

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18. The summits were typically a meeting of the party leaders with the prime minister and possibly other ministers and experts. They could be devoted to one specific issue or to a broader review of the items on the political agenda of that moment.

19. In the case of the DC for instance the Ministry of Labour was traditionally assigned to the "unionist faction" while the Agriculture Ministership was controlled by politicians close to the main small farmers association (Coldiretti)

20. On this point a more detailed analysis is provided by Calise and Mannheimer (1982). In this study the authors focused on the pattern of career and persistence of the Christian Democratic *super elite* of ministers. This pattern was based on a clear *partyness* of the ministerial candidates, and it required a strong individual electoral performance and a fairly standardized pathway through parliamentary and governmental position.

Coming more specifically to the problem of coalitional behaviour, the first thing to be said is that no formal rule could provide for a very strict governance over the members of the coalition. And because of their weakness and ambiguity coalition agreements could not be a real substitute for such rules. The same can be said about the rules concerning the dissolution and formation of a new coalitional formula. No formal resolution mechanism, on the other hand, was provided for bringing the coalition to an end in case of governmental inefficiency.

Many observers have noticed, how variable could the willingness and ability of different cabinets to respect and implement the official government platforms. The difference for instance during the "centre-left" period, between the cabinets of the sixties and of the seventies is thought to have been from this point of view quite significant (Amato 1981). In a similar way the level of coalitional cohesion has undergone important changes during the "five-party" era. At the beginning of this phase, when the attempt to strengthen the institutional role of the Cabinet and to introduce some majoritarian features in the Italian political system were more evident, the parties seemed engaged also in the building of a relatively more ambitious policy platform including broad economic and institutional reforms. The fact that the Christian Democratic party accepted for the first time to leave the position of Prime Ministers in the hands of another party of the coalition (the Republican party first and then the Socialist party) was another clear sign of change. But the results were much less than originally expected and with the passing of time the coalition became more and more oriented to a pure "office seeking, policy-controlling" activity [21]. This new turn became particularly clear with the crisis of Craxi cabinet, when the struggle over the prime ministership gained a central position in the life of the coalition and the search of a compromise for ensuring the alternance of Socialist and Christian Democratic leaders in the position of premier overshadowed discussions about the policies to be pursued[22].

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21. Under this respect the decade of five-party coalition could be divided in two periods: the rise and the consolidation of a politically ambitious project (with the cabinets led by Spadolini and Craxi) and a long decay, from the re-negotiation of the coalition under the weak Goria Cabinet, to the failure of de Mita, to the leadership of Andreotti. About the dynamics of the *five-party coalition* see Pasquino (1994) and Cotta and Isernia (1996)

22. It is the famous *patto della staffetta* .

Did the pattern of coalition governance change significantly during the transition period after the crisis of the traditional governing parties (1992 - 1995) ? During this rather confused phase both technical and political cabinets have alternated in power (table 1). The two types of cabinet have faced somewhat different problems, but the weakening of the old parties and the still rather uncertain consolidation of the new ones plus the volatility of coalitional behaviour have prevented in all these cases the elaboration of strong and comprehensive coalitional agreements [23] . The style of governance was therefore not too dissimilar from the past. The main new element was the increased role of the President, who has frequently dictated from outside the cabinet the guidelines for its action. To an extent the President has substituted the party leaders in this role of external guidance of the executive.

*5. Coalition termination*

Cabinet termination is, in the Italian case, an interesting theme of analysis under different points of view. The explanation of the high number of terminations we counted is, in itself, a crucial problem for social scientists. On the other hand we have already mentioned the variable meaning of "termination types" : from cabinet terminations that close a coalitional period, to those that are linked to the creation of a new coalitional formula, to those that are simply part of the re-negotiation of limited aspects of a coalition, etc. In a few words, the termination of a cabinet is a political tool, used with very different aims from coalitional actors who want to adopt a new (destructive or constructive) attitude towards the existing coalition.

Constitutional lawyers generally differentiate types of governmental crises on the basis of procedural aspects; in particular if they were produced by a parliamentary vote of no confidence or if the cabinet dimissioned without such a vote. In Italy most of the crises have been of the second type ("extra-parliamentary crises") (Carducci 1989; Ruggeri 1990). But if

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23. The three major parties included in the winning coalition of 1994 developed their own program before the elections and the common document was little more than a double *preamble* about the reasons of the electoral coalitions (FI-LN in the North, FI-MSI in the south of the country). In 1996 more clearly defined electoral platforms were proposed from the winning alliance (*L'Ulivo*) and from the loosing one *(Polo per le libertà*). It is early, anyway, to evaluate the meaning of those documents in terms of coalitional behaviour.

we look to the real explanations of cabinet crises, the typology becomes much more complicated. There are in fact several causes of the crises and they are often overlapping. Quite often these causes are related to the different levels of the political game where both party and sub-party actors are involved, and where sometimes the formal and informal role of the Head of State and of some other institutional actors are also relevant. Because of this it is first of all important to assess who are the actors really involved in the game and then to examine their strategies. It is important, in the explanation of the coalition process, to identify the real aims of the actors who open the crisis: do they intend to leave the coalition[24] or simply to change their role inside it[25] ? Of some importance are also the reactions of the Prime Minister, who can use different strategies (immediate acceptance of the crisis or attempts to resist and request of a formal confidence vote in Parliament) in order to enhance his chances of winning the leadership of the next cabinet. Finally one should not forget the possibility that some parliamentary actors might ask for a public debate in parliament [26].

A general overview of cabinet termination shows the importance of " non technical causes" of the crises. Even until 1968, when every parliament reached its regular end, the instability of *centrism* and *center-left* coalitions produced during each term several cabinets with different perspectives and life expectancy.

The political perspectives of every crisis are different; and this has very much to do with the sub-period of the coalition formula, whether it is that of preparation, consolidation or crisis of that coalition. Furthermore we

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24. The most common way to initiate a governmental crisis is the threat by a party delegation to leave the cabinet. Many times this event has brought directly to the resignation of the same Prime Minister, or more rarely to a parliamentary vote of confidence. Very rare is the explicit request for a confidence vote by one of the parties of the coalition

25. Quite often the orientation of one party at the beginning of the crisis can be partially or totally changed during the development of the next cabinet formation but it is significant to see what was the initial impression that the parties wanted to leave. We can call it the crisis management style of every party.

26. This has always been a crucial moment. In many cases the PM has attempted to solve the crisis before it came to a confidence vote either by proposing some change in governmental composition (the so called *rimpasto*) or by announcing the willingness to continue even after a minor party had left the coalition. In some cases (Zoli, Cossiga and, recently, Dini) the PM preferred to present his resignation to the President of the Republic before a formal vote of no confidence

find in every case many substantive reasons of cabinet termination working together. The empirical analysis shows the importance of intra-party conflicts in determining the end of transitional single party cabinets in the first period considered, and confirms the strong relationship existing between complexity of the crisis and extent of coalitional change (Battegazzorre 1987).

Looking at the history of governmental termination in Italy in a more systematic way (table 3) it is possible to divide the long cycle of the First Republic in two periods. The first period goes from the end of the anti-fascist coalition to the end of the first "centre left" phase, the second from the mid-seventies to 1992.

During the first period constitutional and "technical" causes of termination could have some greater importance since four legislatures reached their natural end. However three cabinets coded here as having resigned because of regular election, [27] had in fact lost their parliamentary support already some time before the election and were "invited" by the Head of State to stay in office until the new parliament would be in place. In the end most of the cabinets were pushed to resign because of a parliamentary crisis opened by a defeat of the government in the legislative process[28]. During this period the behaviour of the smaller parties of the coalition (Liberals, Republicans and Social-democrats during the "centrism", Socialist, Republicans and Social-democrats during the "centre-left") was relatively coherent and predictable. In particular, the first phase of the centre-left (1964-1968) represented a fairly long lasting (at least for Italian standards) coalitional formula. All along this period, and specially during the fifties, one of the most important troubles for the stability of the cabinet was represented by conflicts within the predominant government party (the DC). Although it is not very easy to distinguish to what extent these conflicts were about policies (between the left and "social" factions on one side and the conservative ones on the other) or simply about the internal allocation of governmental positions, it is sufficiently clear that the second element was always very important both at the moment of cabinet formation and of cabinet crisis.

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27. They are the Zoli cabinet (1958), the Fanfani cabinet (1962) and the Moro cabinet (1968)

28. We are talking of a parliamentary crisis in a substantial sense but not in a strictly legal one which would imply a vote of no confidence.

Inter-party and intra-party (within the DC) conflicts have been particularly intense during the preparation of the centre-left coalition, the so called "opening to the left". Strong policy conflicts between the DC and the PLI, a former governing party which will refuse the new alliance with the PSI, but also inside the Christian Democratic party characterised and delayed the preparation of the *centre-left* (tables 3 and 4).

After 1972 the scenario of Government terminations had clearly changed: no legislature could arrive to its regular end and early elections were always called[29]. Inter-party conflicts acquired a predominant weight. Inside the coalition both policy and pure personnel conflicts were always present, but generally speaking it can be said that personal fights among ministers of different parties and/or among party leaders tended to increase compared to the past. This does not mean that "policy issues" have had nothing to do with governmental life, but that the position of parties were not so clear in this respect. Especially during the eighties a frequent consequence of such conflicts was that one of the coalitional partners would ask for a reassessment (*verifica*) of the state of the coalition (generally using for such purpose a majority summit) in order to defend the action of its ministers and to discuss or attempt to discipline the actions of the other governmental partners. This was, most of the times, the first step of the crisis.

According to the research framework we have coded most of these examples of cabinet termination as a "personnel conflict" but we have to specify that in most of the cases the struggle was not purely about personalities, but rather used them within the context of a confrontation about the allocation of power within the coalition. The real issue in the end was the share of executive power controlled by the leading group of each coalitional party. With this in mind we can say that "personnel conflicts" (often instrumentally interwoven with policy conflicts or with a symbolic issue by the conflicting actors[30]) were, in the last twenty years, the typical cause of cabinet termination and, in the end, the most significant con-

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29. We have coded the end of the Andreotti VII cabinet (1992) as a "regular parliamentary election" termination. To be accurate, we should code "early parliamentary election" because the polemic resignation of Head of State (Cossiga) produced an anticipation, even if just for two months, of the date of the general elections. But, since the anticipation of the elections was not determined by the verification of the lack of any parliamentary majority, we do not consider it as a behavioural reason for cabinet termination

straint for the *five-party coalition*[31]. In fact most of the "five-party coalition" cabinets during the IX and the X legislature were forced to resign because of a struggle between party leaders which had only to a limited extent to do with substantive policy issues, and was much more linked with competition for the supremacy within the coalition and with contrasting interpretations about the pacts for the alternance between Christian Democrats and Socialists in the position of prime minister (the so called *patto della staffetta*).

In conclusion, the analysis of cabinet termination in the Italian experience suggests to underline two different points. First, the assiduous use of cabinet crises as a tool for solving coalitional problems in different political situations. Studying more accurately the crucial moments of Italian political history, such as the governmental crises before the beginning of new coalition cycles, it would be interesting to analyse the different strategies, not only those developed by each coalition party, but also those of the possible candidates to the prime ministership. It happened for instance that while some DC leaders were considered at a given moment the "natural" candidates for a specific type of coalition[32], other ones could play the role of leading temporary cabinets in order to win time and overcome inter-party and intra-party conflicts. During each coalitional cycle, we can also see situations where party strategies for preserving the existing coalitional formula or for promoting a new one could be in conflict with the personal strategy of the incumbent Prime Minister or of other potential government leaders[33].

Second, the termination of cabinets could be linked both to intra-party conflict and to external events which could affect the coalition equilibria[34].

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30. A typical case of such symbolic issues could be the request advanced by one of the government parties for a reform or simply the emphasis on a certain subject without a well defined policy program but just in order to distinguish its own position vis a vis that of the rest of the coalition.

31. We are alluding here to personal fights between ministers (for example in the case of the crisis of the cabinets led by Spadolini, coded here as only one government) or to much more evident personal struggles between party leaders like the De Mita -Craxi duel in the middle of the eighties. This conflict directly or indirectly influenced the termination of at least five cabinets: two Craxi cabinets (here coded together), the Fanfani cabinet in 1987, Goria (1987) and De Mita (1988)

32. Moro for instance was the natural leader of the Centre-left, Andreotti in the past of centre-right cabinets and later for national solidarity, etc.

It is obviously quite difficult to quantify the weight of such different causes, but there are good reasons to think that the effects of troubles not directely connected with the previous coalitional platform could be more relevant than in other countries (Lupia and Strom 1995). The abundant and fragmented set of coalitional actors (parties, factions and individual leaders) could find many incentives to take the way of a cabinet crisis in order to improve their bargaining position.

In the last decades the impact of those external and intra-party events has had less to do with the equilibrium inside the largest coalition party (DC) and much more with the "inter-party" balance. The decline of the "predominant party" and the increasing weight of its coalitional partners explains also the greater need of collegiality which seems to have characterised the last period: as many as 19 *majority summits* were called, since 1970, to discuss the possible end of a cabinet, and most of the times those meetings determined the effective termination of an executive (Criscitiello 1996). In other words, the changes in the party system during the eighties (and in particular the enlargement of the effective set of coalitional actors) have not affected so much the frequency of cabinet crisis as their qualitative nature. The weakness of the executive, unable to call for new general elections like in the cases of the semi-presidential democracies or the chancellorships, makes the rest (Ieraci 1996): in spite of attempts to strengthen governmental leadership, cabinet instability in the Italian case remains high, and this seems to hold true also after the recent crucial changes of the electoral system[35]. If, on one side, the almost direct election of the executive leader resulting from the new pattern of majoritarian competition has created a new situation, on the other side two "classic" reasons of cabinet termination for the Italian case are still at work: the presence of

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33. It is the case of the crisis of the Andreotti IV cabinet, but also of a crisis not coded her, but extremely important, in 1987. The Craxi cabinet resigned because of the already mentioned conflicts with DC, and a difficult phase of negotiation was opened. At the end the same Craxi obtained a mandate for a new five party cabinet, but only after an agreement which defined the maximum duration of the cabinet and the perspectives of the coalition

34. Most of the cases here coded as "intra-party conflicts" followed splits inside one of the coalitional parties or, at least were caused by important changes in the internal leadership. About the external event, the most important is surely the impact of "mid-term" local elections.

conflicts due to the fragmentation of the party system and the institutional weakness of the executive.

*6. Conclusion*

As we have seen coalition government and its problems have dominated the Italian political scene since the return to democracy after the fall of the interwar Fascist regime. Even the deep transformations of the political system resulting from the crisis of the early 90s have not altered this basic feature. But to say that governments have been based upon coalitions is obviously not enough to explain the functioning of the Italian executive and its performances. For this purpose the specific features of these coalitions had to be brought into the picture. Looking at these aspects we have evidenced a long term continuity lasting basically until the early nineties. Some significant changes (for instance the end of the DC monopoly over the prime ministership, and a more frequent fusion of the positions of prime minister and of party leader) had begun already in the 80s but the great acceleration of change will begin after the elections of 1992. The fragmentation of the party system with never less (but often more) than seven parties represented in parliament and the long term persistence (albeit with a progressively declining degree of radicalism) of the pro-system/anti-system cleavage dividing the parties with a governing capabiity from those deprived of it have combined until the early nineties to produce a durable pattern of complicated, quarrelsome and scarcely cohesive but at the same time fundamentally irreplaceable coalitions. The lack of real alternatives (if one does not consider as such the substitution of one or the other of the smaller centre parties) has contributed very much to the "stable instability" of Italian governments. Shortlived cabinets have had as their political basis coalitions of parties which most of the times have changed very little from one cabinet to the next. This has meant that a substantial distinction can be drawn between "cabinet" and "coalition" and that the two typically cor-

35. The Berlusconi cabinet, born after the "revolutionary" elections of 1994, lasted only 225 days and failed because of a typical example of conflict inside the coalition. The Dini cabinet was a temporary cabinet with the task to prepare some economic measures and new TV rules before the next elections, but fights among parties produced a different result: the disagreement about the timing of the new elections determined in fact the prolongation of this temporary period, giving the Dini cabinet an increasing political weight

respond to time periods of different length. Except in a minority of cases the making of a cabinet and the making of a coalition are phenomena that cannot be equated. Normally a cabinet, from its birth to its death, has been but one of a series of such political episodes within the relatively longer time span of a coalition formula. This fact goes a long way towards explaining the weakness of the cabinet as an institution and a collegial body and its limited ability to "govern" the political life. Through the making and unmaking of governments party leaders which have typically kept outside of the cabinet have to a significant extent governed underneath and beyond the cabinet at least in the fields that were relevant for their parties. Under this perspective the process of government formation and termination should be viewed as an instrument in the wider process of creation, maintenance and disssolution of coalitions among the parties of the "governmental area" rather than as an end in itself. The separation of responsibilities between parties and government has encouraged the party leaderships to pursue party goals without paying too much attention to the constraints (for instance of a budgetary nature) which governments typically have to face. At the same time one must add that party leaders as a result of this situation have not been able to exploit fully the institutional prestige and legitimation that they would have gained from a more direct involvement in the responsibilities of government. The strong anti-party feelings which have prevailed in the Italian public opinion may have had to do also with this. The attempts during the 80s to overcome the separation between party and government leadership were probably to some extent motivated by the perception that some of the party leaders (Craxi and De Mita) had of this problem. But the coalitional situation of these years and more in particular the tough competition for the leadership of government which had come into being between the two largest parties in government (DC and PSI) as a result of the relative weakening of the DC caused in the end the failure of any attempt to change the relationship between parties and cabinet.

The performances of the Italian system of coalition government have an important part in the explanation of the crisis of the 90s. The limited ability of weak governments to produce innovative policies and thus to face successfully some of the political challenges of this period (in particular the central problem of keeping under control public expenditures and the rise of the state debt and to fullfill the requirements for participation to the European monetary integration) has seriously affected the political credibility

of the traditional governing parties. If one adds to this the waning off after the fall of the Berlin wall and the transformation of the Communist party into the post-communist PDS (Democratic Party of the Left) of what was left of the original legitimation of the governing parties as the bastions of the "anti-communist dam" , it becomes more clear how a limited judiciary action of some prosecutors against a case of political corruption, as "clean hands" was at its beginnings could snwball into a global process against the political class that had ruled the country after fascism.

When little more than two years has elapsed since the political earthquake of 1992-94 the consolidation of a new political system is yet far from being accomplished. The degree of uncertainty about its structure and functioning is necessarily still very large. Yet some significant changes are already apparent. The main feature that deserves to be underlined for our purpose is the end of the permanent exclusion of some parties from the government. With the collapse of the old (permanent) governing parties (and in particular of the largest of them, the DC, which occupied the centre of the political spectrum) all the surviving parties of the first republic plus the newly created ones have aquired the legitimation to play the government game. This, together with the new electoral system, has created the conditions for the appearance of alternative coalitions of the left and of the right (each of which incorporates bits of the old centre). It is clearly an important change from the past when government coalitions were always dominated by the centre. This new feature has gone hand in hand with a transformation of the political role of the prime minister, who now seems to combine more clearly the role of cabinet leader with that of leader of the coalition. In fact with coalitions being established before the elections the latter role becomes the foundation for the former. That this is still not enough to create stable governemnts and strong prime ministers was shown by the events of the last two years. The reasons are pretty clear. The fragmentation of the party systems together with the fact that the electoral basis of some of the parties and their position in the political space were not yet well stabilized explain the rapid failure of the first coalition government (the Berlusconi cabinet) of the new period and its substitution with a "technical cabinet" (the Dini cabinet) having a less clearly defined political connotation. The large agreement to call early elections after one year of technical government and the subsequent return to a political government based upon the winning coalition (the Prodi cabinet) indicate however that this solution could be considered only as a temporary one.

The linkage between elections and governing coalitions seems on the contrary to have come to be accepted as the "normal" feature of the new politics. In the next years the evolution of the new party system, and in particular the greater or lesser ability of the new parties to consolidate their electoral roots and the spatial movements of the small parties of the centre area will have a crucial impact upon the life of the coalitions and the stability and performances of governments.

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Indice delle tavole



**Tables***[36]

List of the abbreviations.

Ministries Parties

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| PM | Prime Minister | PdA | Action Party (left liberal) |
| FOR | Foreign Affairs | PLI | Liberal Party |
| INN | Interior Affairs | DC | Christian Democracy |
| JUS | Justice | PCI | Communist Party |
| BUD | Budget[a] | PsiuP | Unified Proletarian Socialist Party (original Socialists) |
| FIN | Finance | PdL | Work party (Reformed Socialists) |
| ECO | Treasury | PRI | Republican Party |
| DEF | Defence | PSI | Socialist Party (after 1948 split) |
| SCH | Education | PSLI | Social-Democrats (after the 1948 split) |
| PUB | Public works | PSDI | Social Democratic party |
| AGR | Agriculture | PSU | Unified Socialist party (1968 - 1970) |
| TRA | Transports | FI | Forza Italia |
| PT | Communications | LN | Northern League |
| IND | Industry | AN | National Alliance |
| WOR | Labour | CCD | Christian Democratic Centre |

36. * Reduced version of the data-set prepared for this research.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| EXT | Foreign Trade | | |
| MAR | Mercantile marine | TEC | Technicians |
| PAR | State participation | | |
| HEA | Health | | |
| TUR | Turism | | |
| CUL | Culture | | |
| ENV | Environment | | |
| UNI | University and Research | | |

a. Minister of Budget (Bilancio) takes usually care of the expenditures. Minister of Finance looks after taxation system, while the Minister of Treasury is in charge for the preparation of the comprehensive financial policy and, in the end, is the leading actor in the budgetary process