

IPALMO



**Institute for the Relations between Italy and the Countries of Africa, Latin America, Middle
and Far East**

**BUILDING CAPACITIES OF PARLIAMENTARY INSTITUTIONS AND PROMOTING
CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN ARAB COUNTRIES AND THE MIDDLE EAST**

Pilot Phase

LEBANON – JORDAN – IRAQ

Conference promoted by UNDP - POGAR and IPALMO

Beirut, July 23-25, 2007

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July 23, 2007

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“Local powers and autonomies as a resource for the enrichment of national unity. The Italian model of representing the cultural, linguistic, territorial and social differences within economic development”

An “Italian model of federalism”?

In order to understand the “Italian model” (if it exists) one cannot omit analyzing the institutional and the cultural stratification which influenced the evolution of our country. After the Second World War the Constituent Assembly chose regionalism as a model to reconstruct the new Italy. It was the political necessities which enhanced the creation of Regions with a special Charter. However this experience - which reinforced the fears of those who saw in regionalism the possibility of the dismemberment of the State – slowed down the regionalist boost after the adoption of the Constitution. Due to this fear a progressive decentralization towards Municipalities and Provinces was chosen as an approach in order to create the preconditions for the transfer of competencies and resources from the center to the periphery.

In the 70s the institutional challenges generated the creation of Regions of ordinary Charter. A “birth on the quiet”, a process which was immediately sterilized by the alliance between politics and bureaucracy in many cases impeded the transfer of competencies foreseen by the Constitution. The legislative level of the Regions and their institutional capacity were also of “category B”. The “political career” was not determined at all at the regional level but dictated exclusively by the parties’ central secretaries which got used to consider the institutional representation at territorial levels as an intermediate step in a political *cursus honorum*.

The slow and difficult but constant evolution of the Regions contributed to the reinforcement of the awareness to define in a different way the relation between State and Regions. In 1981 the Conference of the Presidents of the Regions was created (grass root initiative) and the central government launched a new approach aimed at

acknowledging the regional identities and sharing responsibilities with the Regions by creating the Conference between State and Regions (initiative from above).

Thanks to the Northern League the issue of federalism entered in the forefront of the political agenda. Not without difficulties however. The new political force in fact opted sometimes for the transformation of decentralization in devolution and the transformation of the federalism in secessionism. In the 90s after the corruption scandals, in a period when the traditional politics founded on parties entered in crisis, the mayors attracted more and more attention. It therefore became frequent talk about "par party of mayors". Some laws promoted by Minister Franco Bassanini attempted to create a more efficient decentralization. These laws however suffered from an inadequate constitutional asset and from a bureaucracy which was reluctant to implement it.

Real change towards regionalism appeared only in 2000 and 2001. In 2000 a constitutional law was adopted which consented the direct election of the President of the Region (it guaranteed major stability to the regional governments and increased the powers of the Presidents of the Region - sometimes defined in the press as "Governors") while in 2001 article V of the Constitution was amended. In that period I was President of the Piedmont Region and President of the Conference of Regions. Notwithstanding the several innovations introduced by these laws they did not succeed in correcting the so-called "imperfect bicameralism". In fact a Federal Senate was not created and this fact constitutes a limit even today.

Reflecting on some historical steps is important to offer a more complete picture of the characteristics of the federalism that took place in Italy. The fact that autonomy and responsibility concerning competencies and resources did not go hand in hand determined the continuation of an "imperfect federalism".

Our country is divided in 20 regions which are very diverse considering their geographic and demographic characteristics. Especially since 2001 the awareness of the need to create a fund available for those territories that face important challenges in their growth and in their financial duties has become strong among the decision makers. The problems to deal with are important considering that in 6 years (since the constitutional amendments) the fiscal federalism in Italy has not taken roots. In these days the Government has presented to the Parliament a draft law in order to implement fiscal federalism. It is obvious that the government's project is burdened by a system which is still centralist and where there is a privileged relation between

local entities and the State. In our country the identification with regional identities (considered as something odd in the administrative culture) is still problematic.

What to do? Only through a Chamber where representatives of local governments, metropolises and autonomous territories will be seated it will be possible to guarantee a legislative balance necessary to complete the road towards a genuine federalism.

It would be a historical reform, desired by many, which could innovate and make more effective the institutional asset of our country. A bicameralism where two Chambers deal with the same questions (all draft laws have to be adopted by both) entails not only the burdening of the system but also the crisis in the legislative role of the parliament. Hence it is necessary to restore quality in the legislative process by diversifying the role of the two Chambers and guaranteeing that one of it becomes the authentic expression of the territories' concerns.

This way it would be possible to propose some concepts which before could not be put forward. I am referring to the possibility of devolution of some competencies from the center to the periphery. I imagine for the future a federalism of variable geometry, not focused only on the development gaps like today but also on the territorial vocations which distinguish one region from another. I think that times are mature for the creation of a federalism of variable geometry where some regions would move faster in assuming competencies, responsibilities and resources in determined sectors.

This objective however could be achieved only if there was a change in the way of interpreting the economic policy (in particular its instruments). I am referring to the document of economic and financial programming which today constitutes a charter of principles of the economic policy of the central level and which instead should transform in a useful "document of the governance", a sort of annual pact among government, Regions and local autonomous territories about the priorities and the jointly agreed objectives. This document should be able to define (both on the level of national legislation and on the level of regional legislation) concrete actions which should delineate the sharing of resources and the division of responsibilities and roles in a clear way so that it could represent a guide for the preparation of the financial law.

On the basis of what has been said it is difficult to talk about an "Italian federalism" and hence it is hard to refer to a possible "Italian model" of state structure for what concerns federalism. First of all because two fundamental elements are

missing: a Federal Senate or the Chamber of autonomous territories and the reform of the fiscal system focused on a fiscal federalism. Secondarily I am personally convinced about the existence of some historical and cultural constraints which are connected to the persistence of an important obstacle: a sort of “escape from the responsibilities”, something typically Italian. Until Regions and local entities do not participate in an active way at facing the great challenges of our country it will be hard to implement a real federalist logic.

We have to imagine slimmer Regions which commit themselves to give their best contribution to the legislative process and in the management and we have to make efforts so that the local entities implement rigorously the principle of subsidiarity and avoid managing sectors where the free market can do better.

The “escape from the responsibilities” has to do also with the central government which approaches its relation with Regions and local entities not as an “alliance of institutions” but as a permanent conflict. This is a big mistake. The central government, the regional governments and the governments of the local entities should in all phases of the negotiations sit at the same part of the table. Instead they often stay at opposite sides.

It is true that there is an institutional place - the Conference between State and Regions where the Presidents of the Regions and the Ministers of the Government can exchange views on specific issues but it is also true that often these issues regard the administrative sphere of minor importance and not the great political challenges that characterize the relation between State and Regions. Hence we can talk about a “betrayed governance”. The place of exchange should be reformed in a radical way in order to guarantee another kind of relation based on the great fundamental choices on which in some areas there has to be a common agreement.

A short look at other democracies

If I look at other democracies, in particular at those of North Africa, Middle East and Asia, I find out that federalism can actually represent a hope. The new Iraqi constitution for example seems to bring the country in this direction. I am aware of the ethnical and religious diversities that make this process more difficult. However I am convinced that a federal state can respond in a more efficient way to the growth and to the stabilization of democracy in countries that underwent tragic experiences of dictatorship and war. It is clear that there is a need to make efforts towards the possibility of autonomy, discouraging this way the secessionist aspirations.

Let's not forget that some particularly delicate situations which occurred in the history of Italy (Second World War for example) were resolved through the acknowledgement of territorial diversities and linguistic minorities which entailed the differentiation of territories (some of them characterized by bilingualism and a special autonomy). I think that the Spanish experience as well can represent an important example (acknowledgement of the Catalan identity).

For Italy what happens on the other shores of the Mediterranean Sea is important not only because of the traditions linked to commercial exchanges and to the industrial development but because our country as a natural bridge connects Europe with North Africa and the Middle East.

I believe that the *phoedus*, a possible pact among different communities can become the key in the reconstruction process of institutions even in territories where the hate unfortunately has deep roots. Even in the most tormented parts of the continent federalisms could reveal to be "an ingredient for the peace".

The West should not hide herself. And if the national diplomacies' efforts are evident, I believe that the European Union could and should do much more. Something maybe should be said about the reform of the international cooperation. The efficiency of the undertaken actions should be assessed linking together the single regions or groups of regions with the local realities of Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon. Contact groups should be in charge of monitoring and analyzing the use of resources allocated to the cooperation. Such a cooperation, in my view should serve the stabilization of democracy (besides serving humanitarian purposes).

Further steps should be undertaken also elsewhere. I am referring for example to the United Nations and to the need to create inside the U.N. structures that enhance the exchange of experiences among the different territories and regions. Finally it is necessary to encourage the interregional dialogue, focusing on the specific aspirations of single territories in order to enhance the stabilization of modern democracy.