

# The Prime Minister's Office in Italy (1948-2016)

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**Abstract: La Presidenza del Consiglio in Italia (1948-2016)** – This work is divided into four parts. The first is an excursus on the difficult birth and organization of the Italian Prime Minister's office. The second relates the principal administrative reforms of the core executive during the 80s and 90s with particular attention to the role of the head of government. The third part concerns the two aspects of the Prime Minister's role – administration and decision making – during the Silvio Berlusconi era (the longest lasting government in the history of Republican Italy). Finally, the fourth part proposes an initial analysis of the changes made in the Prime Minister's office of the Renzi government.

**Keywords:** Italian Executive, Italian government, Prime Minister's Office, Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, Italian Core Executive, Administrative Presidency

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## 1. Introduction

Between the 1990s and the 2000s many democracies have been witness to a rise in their executive with a consequent reinforcement of the top political-administrative structures<sup>1</sup> and to a growing centralization within these structures of the authority of the head of government, whether he be the President or the Prime Minister<sup>2</sup>.

In this true and proper “search for the centre” by contemporary governments we can analytically distinguish two levels: one concerning the ambit of administrative reform and the other concerning the monocratic and personalistic centrality of the Prime Minister's power.

Emblematic in this regard is the case of the administrative reorganization of the Italian governments where “a sort of reform of the *centre* is being carried out – through the *subtraction* of functions and the *redefinition* of the organizational structures – called upon to become the unifying element of the action of a series

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<sup>1</sup> G. Peters, W. Rhodes e V. Wright *Administering the Summit. Administration of the Core Executive in Developed Countries*, London, 2000; A Criscitiello, *Il cuore dei governi*. Napoli, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> T. Poguntke e P. Webb (eds), *The Presidentialization of Politics*, Oxford, 2005; F. Musella and P. Webb (eds) *The Personal Leader in Contemporary Party Politics*, Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica/Italian Political Science Review, 45, 3, Cambridge, 2015.

of administrative systems and the linking element between the different levels of government”<sup>3</sup>. In effect, this process has been carried out by the Presidency of the Council of Ministries (*Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri*, PCM): a sort of privileged laboratory where one of the most interesting administrative policy changes over the last 25 years has developed.

As regards the rise of the Prime Minister’s role, we have observed a process of presidentialization of the executive which has involved the parliamentary systems and caused a rise in power of the head of government, who Cassese defined as an *elected monarch*<sup>4</sup>. A process that is particularly evident in Italy.

The starting point, interesting from a political sciences perspective and its research agenda, is the reform process of the executive through its top structures which has to all effects been carried out without any changes in the constitution. That is, they have on one hand made use of organizational procedures and on the other relied on administrative solutions, very often, as we shall see, under the direct responsibility of the head of government.

In this process of policy change that has invested many western democracies Italy represents one of the most interesting cases. In fact, it is the only country that has put its hopes for governability in the constitutional type of political reform without proposing a real constitutional revision, at least until 2016.

The Italian case has thus become the emblem of a suspension between an entirely administrative reform of the top executive (the only reform that has in fact been implemented) and the many attempts (so far unsuccessful) to revise the Constitution regarding the form of government. The longstanding need for improvements in governability has in fact often been associated with Constitutional reforms which have in reality always failed, right up to the constitutional referendum in December 2016.

This work is divided into four parts. In the first we give an excursus on the difficult birth and organization of the Italian Prime Minister’s office. In the second we relate the principal administrative reforms of the core executive during the eighties and nineties with particular attention to the role of the head of government. The third part concerns the two aspects of the Prime Minister’s role – administration and decision making – during the Silvio Berlusconi era (today the longest lasting government in the history of Republican Italy). Finally, the fourth part proposes an initial analysis of the changes made in the Prime Minister’s office of the Renzi government.

## **2. A story of a government without a Prime Minister’s office**

For reasons that depend mostly on the period in which the new Constitution of the Republic was written, the Italian government was born as a weak

<sup>3</sup> A. Pajno e L. Torchia, *La riforma del governo*, Bologna, 2000, 64

<sup>4</sup> S. Cassese, *Il potere esecutivo nei sistemi parlamentari di governo*, in «Quaderni Costituzionali», n. 1, pp. 141-148, 1993.

institution<sup>5</sup>. Being so close in time to the fascist government meant that the founding fathers of the Constitution unanimously worked in fear of giving too much power to the executive, at the expense of the legislative power<sup>6</sup> thus searching for a compromise between the monocratic principle and the collegiate principle in governance. Only with the passing of time the idea of an authoritative and stable executive with good initiative capabilities came into being as a way of improving parliament's constitutional tasks and not as an obstacle to them<sup>7</sup>.

Time was needed to fully believe that autonomy for the Prime Minister could contribute to contrasting the individualism of the members of parliament and inhibit the sectoriality of their own interests<sup>8</sup> thus contrasting the inefficiency of "government by ministries"<sup>9</sup>.

However, directly after the Second World War, the parties who wrote the Constitution did not really agree on how to make the government work in practice<sup>10</sup>. And in fact they did not solve the problem of organization of the Prime Minister's office and staff, deciding instead to postpone it. The Italian Constitution, that deals with government in its Articles from 92 – 96, delegated the problem of its organization and top structures to ordinary legislation resulting in a legislative gap. Add to this the fact that all the governments were coalition governments on one side strengthened the individual autonomy of the ministers with a weak Prime Minister and, on the other, the absolute supremacy of the parties in decision making<sup>11</sup>.

Up until the end of the seventies, in fact, there were very few attempts to reform government organization and the Prime Minister's office. However, in those years the government did in some way function and so it became interesting to understand how. What in fact were the normative processes and organizational transformations that allowed it to function. It is a complex process – as we will see in the following pages – that is still ongoing and that has not received any systematic attention from political scientists.

The Prime Minister's office in Italy up until the end of the sixties was a weak and badly organized structure. Moreover, it had to share with the internal ministry not only the support of the legislative office but also its physical spaces, so much so that, for a long time, made room in its buildings to host the Prime Minister's staff.

The first government decree, dating back to De Gaspari, at the beginning of the Fifties, did not even reach the debate stage. It dealt with the organization

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<sup>5</sup> S. Merlini, G. Tarli Barbieri, *Il governo parlamentare in Italia*, Torino, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> E. Rotelli, *La Presidenza del consiglio dei ministri*, Milano, 1972.

<sup>7</sup> G. Rolla, *Il consiglio dei ministri tra modello costituzionale e prassi*, in «Quaderni Costituzionali», 2, 1982, 367-398.

<sup>8</sup> A. Criscitiello, *The political role of cabinet ministers in Italy*, in M. Laver and K. A. Shepsle (eds), *Cabinet Ministers and Parliamentary Government*, New York, pp. 187-200 1994.

<sup>9</sup> M. Cotta and L. Verzichelli, *Sistema politico italiano*, Bologna, 2016.

<sup>10</sup> P. A. Capotosti, *Governo*, in «Enciclopedia Giuridica», Roma, 1989).

<sup>11</sup> N. Conti and F. Marangoni (Eds), *The Challenge of Coalition Government: The Italian Case*, London, 2015.

of the prime ministry into five offices: the cabinet; legislative coordination; the coordination of public administration; information; entertainment and sport. This proposal was no more successful when it was re-presented, with significant modifications, firstly by the Segni government in 1956 and then by the Fanfani government in 1958.

In those years, the Prime Minister's office had an organizational structure similar to that of all the other ministries. The Prime Minister's secretarial section was tiny, made up of about twenty people. It was supported by an office that initially had about thirty collaborators but which, with the passing of time, took on more and more competencies and functions that had little to do with the Prime Minister's tasks of management and coordination and actually only considerably increased the number of staff. Moreover, offices were set up and assigned to ministers without portfolio and to committees that ended up becoming satellite bureaucratic systems orbiting around the Prime Minister's office.

An important proposal for reorganization was implemented by decree under the Prime Minister Aldo Moro at the end of his mandate in June 1964, all the more significant because it came in one of the most difficult stages of republican history<sup>12</sup>. It was an organizational chart divided into 8 structures supported by two offices (financial and public safety) and three secretarial offices: for the Prime Minister, the undersecretary and the head of the secretariat. After the Aldo Moro decree, the general organization of the structure of the Prime Minister's office remained to all effects unchanged for about ten years. In 1974, a decree under the Prime Minister Rumor separated the offices in direct collaboration with the Prime Minister from those of the ministers without portfolio.

Half way through the seventies, therefore, the Prime Minister's office comprised:

- *The legal office for legislative coordination*, the most important structure in the Prime Minister's office, with the tasks of overseeing all the measures to be put before the Council of Ministers, coordinating the action of the government in Parliament and dealing with some of the Council related tasks, such as compiling the daily agenda and writing up the minutes on the basis of the undersecretary's indications;
- *The office for administrative coordination*, divided into structures each of which is competent for a group of subjects that come under the direct intervention of the Prime Minister. Despite the fact that administrative coordination is a key function of the Prime Minister's office, it has long been considered less important than the former and its competencies are much less defined;
- *The office for the regions*, that, starting from the regions under ordinary statute, assumed considerable importance in the control they exercised over the regional laws;

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<sup>12</sup> G. Formigoni, *Aldo Moro. Lo statista e il suo dramma*, Bologna, 2016.

- *The office for general affairs and personnel*, with a wide range of competencies, the greatest being the one for the administration of all the staff in the Prime Minister's office;
- *The office for the organization of public administration*, which in the past was entrusted to a ministry without portfolio and took care of the coordination of public activities and bureaucratic organization;
- *Services for information and literary, artistic and scientific property*, which deals with a series of activities that go from public communication to author's copyrights.

The ministries without portfolio looked after:

- *The office for scientific research*
- *The office for extraordinary interventions in Southern Italy*
- *The office for the implementation of Regions*

As can be seen, there was an organizational structure for the Prime Minister's office that presented a series of problems, not least being the overlarge number of the structures themselves. On one side the Prime Minister's office had become considerably heavier and, on the other, there was no well-defined framework of the functions to be attributed to the ministers without portfolio and to the inter-ministerial committees. An example of this kind of organizational problem is the duplication of the structures destined to the government-regions relations, with an office for the control of the regional laws in the Prime Minister's office and an office for the realization of the regions set up as an organizational support to the minister without portfolio, with the easily imagined repercussions on the coordination of the regional policies.

Key sectors such as legislative and administrative coordination, organization of personnel and community affairs suffered a long process of administrative adaptations, often disorderly, and were now in need of a comprehensive reform policy.

It is only at the end of the Seventies, however, and the beginning of the following decade that the debate on the reform of the organizational structure of the Prime Minister's office, and more specifically, of the role of the head of government, reaches its turning point.

Before then there had been very few legislation proposals, and those only partial and never completed, leading to the conclusion that there had been a true and proper failure in the reform policies of the Prime Minister's office. In fact, despite the fact that since 1948 there had been an office for the reform of the administration, in reality the criteria for reorganization of the executive were not thoroughly considered.

Among the more urgent objectives there was the identification of a well-defined "consultant staff" or a system suitable to the directing function of the Prime Minister and the coordination between the ministerial initiatives and the

governing policies as a whole. Furthermore, the internal communication resources between the Prime Minister and the ministers needed improvement; the number and the roles of the committees had to be reduced; an independent structure for the staff needed setting up and mobility procedures needed to be made easier; and finally, separate and suitable structures had to be set up specifically for community policies and local institutions.

One of the most interesting processes of institutionalization of the top government structures finally began with a series of normative measures that reorganized the PM's office between the end of the seventies and the beginning of the following decade.

It is important to underline that it was not by chance that the reform policy of the Italian core executive started exactly when two new government spheres forcibly emerged and with which the central executive were obliged to interact: the regions and the European Community. They required unitary management and coordinated action. Multilevel governance, that is, requires a central government that can rely on an organizational structure that can only be the institution of reference of the Prime Minister and, therefore, his office. At the same time, the Prime Minister's office became an ever more decisive objective of conquest for the party system, seeing as these are the years when the Democratic Christians lost their monopoly as governing leaders. Up until then, Palazzo Chigi was all in all a less appetizing objective than the leadership of the DC, the real centre of power. Except for the case of De Gaspari, for about thirty years the two posts of Prime Minister and leader of the party never coincided. The top components of the DC party who could aspire to the post of party leader always avoided the risk of direct responsibility in government leadership. Therefore, while in the sixties and seventies this presence is considered a real taboo, in the following decade things started to change, to the point that Andreotti – in reference to the De Mita experience of government – declared the importance of the presence, inside the executive, of the maximum exponents of the majority parties: “all things considered, I am convinced that a good model would be to have, inside the government, as ministers without portfolio, the leaders of the coalition parties, one of whom would be the leader of the government”<sup>13</sup>. The time seemed finally come to organize the actors and the modalities for the management of the ‘control room’.

### 3. The reforms in the eighties and nineties

The years we are now going to consider have a significant role in the «century of governments»<sup>14</sup> and, as has been said with regard to the Italian case, in the century «of the monocratic executives»<sup>15</sup>.

One of the ambits in which we can analyze the process of reinforcement of government is the one concerning the roles and structures of the so-called “core

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<sup>13</sup> G. Andreotti, *Governare con la crisi*, Milano, 1991, 380.

<sup>14</sup> R. Dahrendorf, *Dopo la democrazia*, Roma-Bari, 2002.

<sup>15</sup> F. Musella, *Governi monocratici*, Bologna, 2009.

executives”<sup>16</sup>. In the last thirty years, many western democracies have implemented reform policies through the reorganization of the apical positions following three lines of action: a) centralizing some functions – especially general management and policy; b) decentralizing the merely managerial functions and c) creating new (and often informal) small collegial bodies. In the ambit of this system of relations the role of the head of the executive assumes significant importance. The transformation of his functions in the light of a reorganization of its staff, its dimensions, the type of personnel and the expertise that they can offer allows us to evaluate the improvement.

This process obviously closely concerns also the Italian case where the Prime Minister has been dealing directly with the organizational reform of his office since the eighties. So, we have a true and proper period of experimentation and implementation of the organizational improvements of the Prime Minister's office.

This experimental phase starts with the implementation of a series of decrees and regulations issued by the Prime Minister's office through which the Spadolini government, in office from June 1981, proceeded to reorganize the administration of his office<sup>17</sup>. We have, therefore, for the first time a non-Christian Democrat Prime Minister who set the reorganization of the core executive during a political experience that he himself described as «not at all easy». In fact, he was a representative of those intermediate parties that, after the electoral turndown of the DC and the Communist Party (Pci) in the first years of the eighties, could now aspire to the leadership of Palazzo Chigi. But to do this they had to try and redefine the rules of the relationship between parliament and the executive, in such a way as to guarantee an efficient leadership: «only in this way could the Prime Minister's office, accessible through the powerful force of a coalition, ensure results»<sup>18</sup>.

It was in fact Spadolini, during the VIII legislation, who started that long process of legislative elaboration that led to the law no. 400 in 1988. On the crest of the wave of growing attention, also from public opinion, on the subject of institutional reform, and on the basis of the work done by the Amato commission, he proposed the so-called Decalogue, a formulation in ten points, of the government's reform policy. The first three points directly concerned the Prime Minister's functions: the implementation of autonomy for the Prime Minister in power to propose ministers; the introduction of an office for the coordination of institutional problems; the immediate resumption in parliament of the examination of the proposal for a law on the Prime Minister's office.

More generally, as has already been noted, the Spadolini Decalogue is very important because the reforming executive issue makes its appearance in government planning for the first time and is, therefore, formally presented on parliament's agenda.

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<sup>16</sup> M. J. Smith, *The Core Executive in Britain*, London, 1999

<sup>17</sup> P. Calandra, *La presidenza Spadolini*, in «Quaderni Costituzionali», n. 3, 1982, 669-684.

<sup>18</sup> P. Scoppola, *La repubblica dei partiti. Evoluzione e crisi di un sistema politico*, Bologna, 1997, 444).

Last but not least, during his terms in government Spadolini also tried to face up to the chronic absence of a real policy for the PM's staff by proposing a law for the reduction of the personnel, the creation of a role for employees and by favouring in every way possible mobility for the staff directors. On the other hand, his attention to the selection criteria of staff was one of the distinctive features of his government procedure. For the first time, in fact, a Prime Minister had made public the names, functions and professional background of his collaborators.

Spadolini was followed in December 1982 by a very short lived government led by Amintore Fanfani with a four-party coalition interpreted by many as the first sign of an alternation at Palazzo Chigi that was now becoming one of the most discussed political themes between the parliamentary forces.

After Fanfani's resignation, Bettino Craxi was nominated and led two executives from July 1983 to March 1987, giving him the record – unbroken until Berlusconi – of being the most long lasting Italian Prime Minister. For the first time, access to the Presidency of the Council depended exclusively on a political-party role instead of a long traineeship in an important ministry, as had always been the case in the Italian governing elite<sup>19</sup>. On the administrative front Craxi resolved the problem of his lack of ministerial experience by nominating the expert Giuliano Amato as his undersecretary; while in running his government he distinguished himself for his incredibly decisive personality<sup>20</sup>. He managed to convince three ex-Prime Ministers to come into his government and three party leaders, by formalizing the meetings as cabinet councils (*Consigli di Gabinetto*). He strongly and confidently exploited the prestige (and powers) of his institutional office, making this experience the first real anticipation of the process of personalization and presidentialization of the Italian executive. Even in his daily management – to give one example from many – while Spadolini tried to control the elaboration part of policy-making by calling and coordinating preparatory (and preventive) meetings, Craxi made more and more incisive use of the Prime Minister's power to ask his ministers directly for explanations on specific subjects<sup>21</sup>.

As far as the reform of the core executive is concerned, no legislative progress was made but the organization of the presidency of the council underwent a significant number of changes, often informal, that can be inscribed in a process of reinforcement of the executive power. Starting from the redefinition of communication and the agenda setting of the council of ministers, Craxi often personalized the government management, favouring the use of small collegial mechanisms. An example was the technical committee for economic policy: an organism with quite an agile structure, the concrete

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<sup>19</sup> M. Calise and R. Mannheimer, *Come cambiano i governanti di partito*, «Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica», n. 3, 1986.

<sup>20</sup> S. Colarizi and M. Gervasoni, *La cruna dell'ago. Craxi, il partito socialista e la crisi della Repubblica*, Roma-Bari, 2005.

<sup>21</sup> P. Calandra, *Il Governo della Repubblica*, Bologna, , 1986.

expression of a certain way of running the oligarchy that was characteristic of Craxi's leadership<sup>22</sup>. The second mechanism, less original in that it was instituted for the first time by Spadolini, was in reality a committee of experts in economics, assisted by a technical staff, and created to supply the Prime Minister with all the information and advice he needed in financial matters, in the same way other democracies did for their heads of government.

In his office, Craxi followed the dull Christian Democrat government for a few months, to all effects pre-electoral, and came to office in spring 1987, presided once again by Fanfani, who brought no significant changes in the organization of the PCM.

The following executive, led by Giovanni Gorla from the Christian Democrats, closed the political phase of reform of the presidency that went from the organization guidelines in the Giannini report to the presentation in parliament of the law no. 400 in 1988. A phase, as we have seen, characterized substantially by interventions from presidential initiatives of a prevalently informal type that existed alongside – in a continuous process of reciprocal adaptation – the normative acts.

Law no. 400 organized the presidency of the council of ministers following four main indications that had emerged in the reports elaborated over the years from the different research commissions and regarded:

- the organization of the systems of the presidency into departments and offices;
- the creation of a secretariat in support of the council of ministers;
- the reinforcement of the staff of the president;
- a relationship of trust between the Prime Minister and his staff.

These actions were supposed to follow two precise guidelines: unified management and organizational flexibility. The interesting aspects here, therefore, regard the competencies of the Prime Minister. Above all he holds powers of coordination and directives over the ministers. In particular, he can suspend the act of a minister and ask for the approval of the whole council. He calls the council of ministers and he initiates the questions of trust for certain measures; he nominates the undersecretary to the presidency, countersigns the acts with legal value and every other deliberation made in the council of ministers. Furthermore, this reform amplifies the Prime Minister's power of nomination. From the running of the presidential staff and the general personnel, this law in fact allows for flexibility criteria taken from the spoils system model<sup>23</sup>, redefining significantly the relationship between politics and administration<sup>24</sup>.

The Prime Minister's staff – in the form provided for in the law we are analyzing – is organised in a series of policy structures. Among these, one of the

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<sup>22</sup> C. Barbieri, *Il Capo del governo in Italia. Una ricerca empirica*, Milano, 2001

<sup>23</sup> F. Di Mascio, *Partiti e Stato in Italia: le nomine pubbliche tra clientelismo e spoils system*, Bologna, 2012.

<sup>24</sup> For an useful and complete review on this topic, see: *2014 Report on Public Administration*, www.irpa.eu.

most strategic, collocated inside the secretariat, is the department for legal and legislative affairs (DAGL), which has the aim of coordinating the legislation initiatives and the normative activities of the government. The normative power of the government thus acquires, thanks to this law, a central role also from a formal viewpoint<sup>25</sup>. For the first time, in fact, the instruments with which the executive makes laws, starting from its regulations, are placed in a causal relationship with the administrative organization and, above all, with improving its functioning. The process of de-legislation and simplification of the administration started here<sup>26</sup> and will see its apex in the following decade.

Both from the procedural and normative management of the presidency, the most significant steps were made in the so-called period of institutional transition. It is in fact during the first half of the nineties that the government confirmed itself – starting from the executive led by Giuliano Amato – as “the true object of political innovation, promoting reform in vast sectors of organization, through the use of legislative delegation and urgent decrees”<sup>27</sup> Amato managed – no doubt helped by the particular historical moment – to conclude four large reforms in the sectors for health, national insurance, local finance and civil service, thanks to the instruments for normative powers held by the executive.

The first novelty on the organizational level could be seen in the modality of formation of the government and its structure. An important intervention from the new President of the Republic, Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, in the consultation phase and a strong reduction in the number of ministers created an executive that was slimmer and characterized by a “prime ministerial nature” with an organization structured in a vertical sense. Above all, Amato did not nominate the Vice President of the Council, while the undersecretary to the presidency received the office for relations with parliament. Therefore – for the first time since the application of the Law no. 400 – the running of the relations with the parties inside the Parliament was entrusted to an organ in direct support to the Prime Minister instead of to a minister without portfolio. All the advantages of the substantial elasticity and organizational flexibility prescribed by the law on government organization emerged during this phase of crisis of the party system, allowing the Prime Minister to “verify the capability of the Italian executive to develop its independence when necessary”<sup>28</sup> and, therefore, to enhance his role and powers of direction in the general policies of government, thus laying the conditions for a significant affirmation of premiership.

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<sup>25</sup> N. Lupo, *Dalla legge al regolamento. Lo sviluppo della potestà normativa del governo nella disciplina delle pubbliche amministrazioni*, Bologna, 2003.

<sup>26</sup> A. Natalini, *Le semplificazioni amministrative*, Bologna, 2002.

<sup>27</sup> G. Pitruzzella, *Forme di governo e trasformazioni della politica*, Bari-Roma, 1996.

<sup>28</sup> G. Amato, *Un governo nella transizione. La mia esperienza di presidente del consiglio*, in «Quaderni Costituzionali», n. 3, XIV, 1994, 355 ff

The following executive, formed in April 1993 by F. arlo Azeglio Ciampi, was characterized by greater room for negotiation for the Prime Minister, a trend that was to continue in the following decades<sup>29</sup>.

Mostly composed of technicians and university professors – it was called “the professors’ government”<sup>30</sup>– it immediately dedicated great attention to the general themes of institutional and administrative reform. Minister for public functions, Sabino Cassese, started a process of organizational innovation over a very wide range, from public services to ministerial structures and companies; from the regulation of the civil service to the simplification of administrative processes, up to the constitution of new control mechanisms. These reforms were, yet again, implemented through the legislative instrument of delegation, thus contributing to institutionalize the passage of this constitutional policy from the arena of parliamentary decisions to that of the government. Furthermore, similar to what Amato had achieved in various sectors, Cassese’s reforms included measures connected to the financial law and also obtained the significant advantage of being associated to the control and reduction of the public deficit.

On the specific question of the political reform of the presidency, Ciampi, supported by his deep knowledge of the government apparatus, was able to accelerate the process of the reorganization of Palazzo Chigi through two important interventions: one regarding the internal regulation of the council of ministers in November 1993 and the other the reorganization of the secretary general in March of the following year.

These were two decrees that in practice codified all the positive aspects that the managerial experience of the presidency from 1988 onwards had brought to fruit, attempting at the same time to correct the faults. Once again, therefore, we can see a process of law making that is more and more characterized by the production of legislation rather than laws, that is by interventions over the medium-short period finalized at the realization of specific objectives. In this case, the normative intervention aimed at improving the direction of the executive by the President by reinforcing some of the staff structures, such as that of Secretary General, the Secretariat for the EU Affairs and, above all, the Ministry for Relations with Parliament. The different measures prescribed by the new regulation also had the objective of binding the Council of Ministers as a whole to a coordinated action. In fact, all the coordination and consultation activities, both internal and external to the executive, are reinforced: for example, internally, through the formal institution of preparatory meetings, that must necessarily precede the Council of Ministers. In this way, they finally formalized an organizational solution to the problem of the final phase of government decision-making where the ministers in the council have to discuss an agenda very often unknown to them.

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<sup>29</sup> M. Cotta and L. Verzichelli, *Manuale di Sistema politico italiano*, Bologna, 2016).

<sup>30</sup> C. Chimenti, *Il Governo dei professori*, Firenze, 1994.

The Ciampi regulation, furthermore, also reorganized the external relations of the executive, starting from those with the parties in Parliament. Here, both through updating the calendar coordination and the tasks of the ministers for relations with parliament, the executive acquired a more decisive control over the agenda setting. In synthesis, therefore, the regulation of the council of ministers clearly shows an approach that attributes to the Prime Minister a preeminence that is not merely formal in the ambit of the cabinet and a rigorous style of co-responsibility for every minister.

Despite the expectations, however, the very first majority government of the Republic is also the least innovative as far as the policies for the administrative reforms are concerned and, in particular, the managerial organization of the presidency.

The first, led by Silvio Berlusconi in 1994, saw the Prime Minister prevalently occupied with solving the problems of his political coalition. He and his staff did not have the time, and probably neither the necessary administrative expertise, to dedicate themselves to redesigning the top organization structures of the executive.

The following government, presided by Lamberto Dini, was for the first time since the war, made up exclusively of non-parliamentary technicians and bureaucrats, and with the exception of only two cases, by ministers with no previous government office. This exceptional case in the history of the Italian republic was further characterized by an executive with a high number of *grands commis* – mostly magistrates from the Council of State and from the Court of Auditors – placed in key roles in the ministries and in the Prime Minister's office. Given the fixed period of his mandate, he did not have time to pay particular attention to the reform policies of the presidency, even though it is still an interesting case of management of the network of collaborators and structures of the Prime Ministers' staff<sup>31</sup>. Looking closer at institutional reforms, Dini on several occasions declared to be in favour of reinforcing the role of the Prime Minister, in order to ensure unity of action in the reform of public administration and the implementation of European directives.

It will in fact be his successor, Romano Prodi, to make the turning point in the policies of reorganizing the executive. The government presided by Romano Prodi, in office from May 1996, made a true and proper redefinition of the reform policy for the Prime Minister's office. This government, in fact, represented the beginning of a new phase of reform of the Italian core executive, after an initial period of organization procedures and a second phase linked mostly to the first actuation developments of the Law No. 400 of 1988. More generally, the reform of the administration as a whole became a central issue in the middle of the nineties on the political agenda and the government programme, and came out of the inner circle to become an issue also for public opinion.

Appointed Prime Minister as the recognized leader of the centre-left coalition that won the general election of April 1996, Prodi was to direct an

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<sup>31</sup> G. Negri, *Un anno con Dini. Diario di un governo «eccezionale»*, Bologna, 1996.

important institutional reorganization of the government with a modality that was almost “prime-ministerial”. From a normative point of view, the road to reinforcing the government is through the use of delegation laws, that is, that legal instrument that parliament temporarily transfers to the executive for the realization of specific objectives. This is one of the important passages in the reform policy of the top Italian executive. The process of formulation of the decisions is in fact moved from the parliamentary arena, in which ambit the various political parts confronted each other on the Law No. 400, to the governmental area, where it is the head of the executive who decides. In particular, with the delegate Law No. 59 of 1997, Prodi proposed the reorganization of the three fundamental pillars of the executive: the system of autonomies, the ministerial system and state management<sup>32</sup>. The reform policy is thus articulated into a series of interventions regarding various specific sectors but held together by a unitary programme. From this moment onwards the history of the reform of public administration is no longer that of an (improbable) change without a project<sup>33</sup> but one “of a project for a procedural and progressive change”<sup>34</sup>.

On the more specific front of the reorganization of Palazzo Chigi, the principal objective that caused this substantial revision of the reform of the presidency – less than ten years from the application of the Law No.400 – was to regulate all the new structures assimilated over time and to redesign at the same time a true autonomy for the presidency that was separate from the other ministries.

Finally, the instruments for flexibility in organization and management provided for in the previous law were improved and instruments for the so called horizontal flexibility were introduced which eventually allowed the recognition of diversified regimes in the various offices. These offices, therefore, would be differentiated not only according to their political or managerial activities but also in accordance with the application of the rules of the spoils system and the modalities for retribution, thus giving incentives to the personnel, and setting up in this way – a really exceptional case in Italian administrative system – a change orientated towards professionalism rather than only organizational solutions<sup>35</sup>. In this way, Prodi institutionalizes the procedure of frequent (and substantial) recourse to the figure of the external advisor, often coming from the private sector, that – as we shall see – will be fairly successful in future governments.

The next executive, held by Massimo D'Alema, in the Council of Ministers of the 4<sup>th</sup> June 1999, approved one of the most important measures regarding the reform of the executive. In fact, they deliberated on the scheme of the decree law regarding the reorganization of the ministries then finally approved on 30<sup>th</sup> July

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<sup>32</sup> Cfr Law 59/97 on the *Delegation to the government for the Reform of Public Administration*, published in the Official Gazette, no. 98 of 29<sup>th</sup> April 1997, in particular, as concerns the presidency and the ministries, articles 11 and 12.

<sup>33</sup> G. Capano, *L'improbabile riforma*, Bologna, 1992.

<sup>34</sup> A. Pajno and L. Torchia, *La riforma del governo*, Bologna, 2000.

<sup>35</sup> M. Fedele, *Come cambiano le amministrazioni pubbliche*, Roma-Bari, 1998.

and which originates from the Decree Law no. 59 of 1997 dedicated to the reform of the government and approved during the Prodi government.

In synthesis, it establishes an organization in departments for most of the ministries; the transfer of technical-operational tasks to agencies; the transformation of prefects into territorial government offices; a greater responsibility in the management of employees and financial resources; the reorganization of the staff and, most interesting, the thinning out of the organizational structure of the presidency of the council of ministers. This decree underlines explicitly that the presidency and the ministries are structures with different needs and therefore, must be reorganized according to different models. Finally, there was a proposal to reduce the number of ministries from 18 to 12.

Naturally, the expected changes of the 1999 reform not only regarded the number of ministries but also their internal organization, the type of decentralization of the structures and the normative powers over ministerial organization. To this purpose all the ministerial structures dedicated to the coordination of policy making are strengthened and qualified, both on the intra-governmental level and the inter-governmental level<sup>36</sup> with the aim to create a lighter and efficient decisional centre.

Even a first reading of the articles in the 1999 Law shows that emphasizing these points from the start is not a mere act of lip service to the constitutional provisions. It is, instead, the starting point of that organizational redefinition that could make the presidency *truly* capable of guaranteeing that the premier is in the condition of carrying out his primary tasks: political direction, coordination functions and relationships with other organs and agencies. Last but not least, this law gives the Prime Minister ample freedom of choice and organization.

The presidential structures redesigned and redefined by the reform in order to assist the head of the executive can be divided into three sectors of competence:

- the sector for *politics*, in which we find the departments and offices that support the Prime Minister in his tasks of political direction of the collegial organ, in the general political planning and in his decisions regarding political aspects;
- the sector for *policies*, in which we find the departments that carry out tasks regarding the coordination of the normative activities of the government, internal control and monitoring of the state of implementation of the programme. To these can be added the structures destined for the coordination of particular *policies* for sectors considered strategic for the government's agenda, policies for equal opportunities and against discrimination and policies for innovation in the public sector and public works. Finally, for the first time, there is an explicit reference to those policies

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<sup>36</sup> On these topics, see: *IRPA Report 2014*, cit. and M. Cotta and F. Marangoni, *Il governo*, Bologna, 2015.

for institutional communication among the Prime Minister's tasks that need adequate support. This is a sign that in Italy too, as in all the other western democracies, there is an urgent need to endow the top executive structures with adequate communication instruments, starting with those offered by internet;<sup>37</sup>

- the sector of *inter-governmental relations*, containing all the structures of the presidency that allow the Prime Minister to coordinate the different levels of government and the relations with the other organs and agencies: parliament, the constitutional bodies, European institutions, the autonomy system, and the different religious confessions. It should be noted on this point that the organization of the presidency is particularly attentive (with two articles *ad hoc*) to the two dimensions of government that had undergone radical transformation during the last decade: the European dimension on one side and the local one on the other. It was probably these stronger driving forces that determined the decisive phase of the reform policy of the presidency. So much so that the importance given to these sectors of *policy* was also reflected in the new model of organization, which deemed necessary the institution of only two “political” departments: a department for EU policies and another for regional affairs.

We now need to talk about all those functions of the presidency improperly attributed to it over the years and that, finally, as they are no longer “part of the autonomous functions of drive, aim and coordination of the president” (Art. 10), are now collocated in their respective offices. Some of these task transfers were immediate while others took a long time and regard the new ministries set up after the new legislation became effective.

On an organizational level, the government following Massimo D'Alema and presided by Giuliano Amato, seemed to bring back to the presidency that well dosed mix of political administration that had always characterized the various paths of his career, starting from his role of undersecretary during the presidency of the two governments led by Bettino Craxi. On that occasion, he valorized the tasks of undersecretary, often taking on a primary role in the formulation of the council of minister's agenda and presiding over several meetings at Palazzo Chigi with a managerial style that seemed to pave the way for a closer relationship between politics and administration. In all the decrees emanated between 2000 and 2001 we can see the objective of strengthening the structures of analysis and elaboration of policies, starting from the department for economic affairs which saw the addition of an office for technological innovation – that ensured support to the president in matters of technology, structures and services on the net and the development in the use of information technology and Internet broadcasting. This department, as prescribed by the reform of 1999, established activities of analysis and put forward proposals in economic policies as well as an evaluation of its impact on ministerial policies. To deal with these objectives, a revision of the professional aspects was added to the

structural reorganization: about thirty young managers were set on with the tasks of study and research<sup>38</sup>.

Alongside the structures of policy, the organs for inter-institutional linking were strengthened which allowed the executive to coordinate the different levels of government: the department for relations with parliament, the linking structures with local governments and the department for EU policies.

#### 4. The Berlusconi Era

With his victory in the elections of spring 2001, Silvio Berlusconi inaugurated as Prime Minister – and as the leader of his party – the new legislature. As far as the formation of his executive goes we can find a whole series of new developments<sup>39</sup>. First of all, the process of allocating the portfolios actually started before the elections: during one of the longest electoral campaigns in Italian political history, the candidate for president of the centre-right coalition, the ‘Casa della Libertà’, had in fact already presented its potential government team, together with its programme with an exorbitant and at the same time professional use of the media. Differently from his first government experience in 1994, Berlusconi could this time count on a leadership and a coalition built and consolidated long before the elections. And if in the formation of the government both the coalition dynamics and the heightened role of the head of state played important parts, what was actually decisive was the presidential logic in managing the PCM<sup>40</sup> in the same way as he had always personally managed the nominations of the directory positions inside his party<sup>41</sup>.

Berlusconi chose many of his ministers from the most faithful parliamentary members of Forza Italia, beginning with three components of the presidential committee and tried to contrast the numerous obstacles caused by coalition logics thanks to the collaboration of an exiguous ministerial inner circle.

Speaking specifically about the organization of the core executive the tendency for a politicization and personalization had already emerged in the nominations of the two undersecretaries to the presidency: on one hand by re-proposing Giovanni Letta, his right hand – as well as being a much respected political counselor – in the role of secretary to the Council of Ministers which had already been his position in 1994; and on the other by nominating Paolo Bonaiuti as director of the sector for Communication and Forza Italia’s public image, as well as being the spokesman for the party and the Prime Minister himself.

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<sup>38</sup> L. Lanzillotta *La riforma della Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri*, in «Quaderno dell’Associazione per gli Studi e le Ricerche Parlamentari», n. 13, 2003, pp. 165-176.

<sup>39</sup> M. Cotta, *Berlusconi alla seconda prova di governo*, in P. Bellucci and M. Bull (Eds), *Politica in Italia*, Bologna, 2002.

<sup>40</sup> M. Calise, *Il partito personale*, Roma-Bari, 2010.

<sup>41</sup> E. Poli, *Forza Italia*, Bologna, 2001.

As regards the administration of the presidency, the Berlusconi government – with a delegate law presented in record time<sup>42</sup> – gave legal standing to the changes established in the 1999 reform without, however, bringing about any substantial modifications. The organization of the ministries showed an initial significant change in the number of ministers that went from 12 to 14: the Health ministry was not grouped, as prescribed, to the ministry of Work and Social Policies and the Communication ministry was not made part of the Production Activities. Furthermore, the figure of a Deputy Minister, to support without substituting the undersecretary, was introduced and, finally, some of the structures of the presidency – such as for example Information and Publishing, the Civil Protection Services and Community services – which should have been placed under ministries or agencies were still at the dependency of the PM's office. So even though Berlusconi's ministerial structure does not overtly accept the innovations set out by the reform policy, his reorganization of the structures inside Palazzo Chigi did undergo certain changes.

Despite the fact that Berlusconi found himself managing an office on the whole well organized, he decided to give the Prime Minister's office his own personal touch with a series of interventions that culminated in the decree of July 23, 2002. Here, as we will see, the most significant changes concerned: the simplification of the institutional communications, in particular as regards the administrative language; the reduction of information systems and some structures; the increase in the use of external consultants.

The Prime Minister's professional media skills and that of his consultants immediately had an effect on institutional communications. From the type of language used in the presidential administrative documents it was easy to see the intervention of experts who did not only come from administrative and public law. For example, in the case of the redefinition of the tasks of the public function we can find "innovation of the organization models", "analysis of staff needs", the upkeep of "computer data banks", the roles in state administration, monitoring and verifying the implementation of the reform of the organization of public administration. With a more or less bureaucratic vocabulary and more orientated towards the private sector, the department for general affairs and for personnel became the "department for human resources and organization" where the President's staff will no longer be "administered" but "acquired" and "trained". The government internet site becomes lighter and more accessible. For the first time, there was a section with the list of offices and departments dedicated to the organization of the PCM, each one with the relative links to pages that further explained tasks and functions. And from the more general point of view of a centralized and integrated communication system, the Internet staff of Palazzo Chigi was incorporated into the structures of the PM's press office. One of the most interesting organizational transformations in the

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<sup>42</sup> The Law is no. 317 of 3rd August 2001, published in the Official Gazzette less than two months from the opening of the government.

structures of the PCM established by the Decree of 2003 regarded the re-dimensioning of the department for economic affairs, which lost its competencies for introit policies, employment and small and medium business on one side, and technological innovations and information on the other. Some policies from the first group were entrusted to the department for territorial economic development (already prescribed by Prodi); while in the second case the department for innovation and technology was restored and entrusted to a minister without portfolio and used for coordinating policies to promote development of information technology companies. Its tasks included elaborating, promoting, updating and monitoring the plan of action for electronic government; encourage innovation in public administration through the guiding and coordination of innovative projects, and the use and acceleration of the dissemination of information technology and communication. The reduction in the competencies of the department for economic affairs corresponded to the strengthening of the ministry of economics that in this way institutionalized that tandem between the premier and the super-ministry for economics, typical of the process of presidentialization of the executive common to many democracies.

If many systems had their tasks lightened, at the same time the number of external councilors was considerably increased. For example, a “contingent of experts”, eight in number, was added to the department for legal and legislative affairs. The department for public functions was allowed to have a maximum of ten experts in addition to those already prescribed by previous regulations. Finally, the office for internal control and evaluation was reinforced with the presence of consultants who had to deal with new tasks such as the optimization of managerial processes, updating methodology and the realization of experimental projects. The department for legal and legislative affairs, on the other hand, had to add to their function that of the predisposition and diffusion of documents through computer systems for the benefit of both public administration and the citizens: in practice this was a first step towards the implementation of the programme for e-government foreseen by the national plan of action. Finally, a department for instrumental resources was created which incorporated three pre-existing offices used for the same functions and dealt with the supply of goods and services, including services for information technology and the management of the presidency’s real estate. The redefinition of the general secretary’s office deserved deeper reflection because, while the number of services all around are being reduced, this office did in fact significantly increase its coordination tasks and its use of external resources for directors in the quality of consultants and experts for study and research. These tasks concerned in detail the analysis of the government’s programme, with explicit reference to the recognition of the commitments taken on by the government in parliament and in coherence with the objectives outlined in the programme. Furthermore, the essential function of support to the Prime Minister in his relations with the other actors of the government was stressed at

every level: the independent administrative authorities, the system of autonomy, the other administrations and bodies. Finally, the tasks of this office also included a structure called upon and presided by the General Secretary for the purpose of coordinating the inter-sectorial type of policies that involved several administrations. To cover this delicate role of coordination Berlusconi did not appoint a director from the private sector, nor an exponent of the Forza Italia party. Instead he invited a *grand commis* with proved technological-administration expertise. Antonio Catricalà was in fact in the past a collaborator with the legal office of the PCM, and also the head of the secretariat and legal councilor in several ministries, and at the time of the nomination was General Secretary of the Communication Authority.

With a reorganization of the presidential apparatus that was attentive to simplifying communication, reducing the merely managerial structures and strengthening those for policies through the use of experts, Berlusconi showed that he knew how to exploit all the available resources in his quarter of a century of administrative presidency.

In 2006 Romano Prodi became Prime Minister for the second time.

Once the first Council of Ministers met, quickly after its swearing-in at the Quirinale, among the first measures undertaken by the new head of government was a Decree Law by which a number of the competences of the presidency and the Council of ministers were revised with the aim – as stated in the press release issued by Palazzo Chigi – of reinforcing government and its programme. With an interpretation of Article 92 of the Constitution which was *quasi*-Prime Ministerial, Prodi tried to deal with the new legislature which presented, from the beginning, even in the eyes of the most optimistic, a route laden with obstacles.

In the phase of formation of his second cabinet, Prodi immediately made recourse to the wide margins of government organization at the disposal of the President of the Council. In fact, during the first Council of Ministers, on the one hand Prodi nominated the without-portfolio ministers, the secretary-general of the presidency and the undersecretaries, and on the other hand, he introduced two important modifications to the organization of the executive. The first regarded the reorganization of ministries which, as we will see below, overturned the Bassanini reform of 1999. The second was more closely in regard to the presidency of the Council, in that the competencies of the inter-ministerial committee for economic programmes (*Comitato interministeriale per la programmazione economica*, CIPE) were transferred from the Ministry of Economy and Finance to Palazzo Chigi. Practically from the start of his executive, Prodi tried to centralize the functions of co-ordination of political and economic planning within the PCM. If a coalition government's need to control the key economic policy themes from the nerve centre of the executive through a kind of inner cabinet directorate was not surprising<sup>7</sup>, it was also true that the decisive mode in which the new President of the Council had put this transfer in place was rather unusual. This could probably be attributed to, on the one hand,

the need to give an immediate sign of the policy direction to the party coalition, and on the other hand, an initial response to the risk of fragmentation of policies between the Ministry of Economy and Finance and the Ministry of Economic Development, above all in the process of planning public investment.

Alongside the nominations of ministers without portfolio there were those of a fiduciary type attributed to the president of the Council in the internal organization of Palazzo Chigi. Among the first to be nominated was the PCM's undersecretary, Enrico Letta, former minister and expert in EU affairs and a convinced *europhile* like Prodi. The other three undersecretaries nominated by Prodi within the PCM shared the same personal fiduciary relationship with the premier and the same depth of political-administrative background.

In the meantime, with a typical Italian logic of *presidency building*, the reorganization of certain structures and tasks of the PCM and the modification of the Italian *spoils system* were decided upon through the normative powers of the executive<sup>43</sup>.

The government that followed the 2008 elections won by the center-right coalition led again by Silvio Berlusconi proved to be the second longest government of the Republic.

The different interventions, again only organizational, aimed to:

- improve the impact analysis on the regulation (September 2008)
- improve the timing and discipline of the proposed regulations (November 2008)
- improve the *iter* of the regulatory acts of the government (February 2009)
- introduce verification tools to analyze the impact on the regulation (November 2009)

All these interventions, promoted by the DAGL, aimed at improving the function of coordination of the PM and strengthening his role.

The Monti government that followed made only small changes in the organization of the PCM, by simply reducing costs and numbers of the presidential structures as part of their spending review policies.

## 5. The Renzi Presidency

On 22 February 2014, the President of the Republic Giorgio Napolitano appointed Matteo Renzi as President of the Council of Ministers. At the time of his appointment, Renzi is the secretary of the Democratic Party, elected in the primaries of 8 December 2013. Except for technical governments (Dini, Ciampi and Monti) Renzi is the first non-parliamentary member to become PM. He was President of the Province of Florence from 2004 to 2009 and then Mayor of Florence from 2009 to 2014. His government was one of the longest: longer than Romano Prodi and almost as long as the government headed by Craxi from 83 to 1986, while the record goes to the two Berlusconi governments.

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<sup>43</sup> A. Criscitiello, *The New Government and the Spoils System*, in A. Mastropaolo and J. Briquet (eds), *The Center-Left's Poisoned Victory*, New York, 2008.

The organizational structure of the PCM during his 1000 days of government follows the Monti decree of 1<sup>st</sup> October 2012.

There are 4 offices in direct collaboration with the President:

- a. The President's office, including its specific secretariat;
- b. The Press office and the President's spokesman's office;
- c. The office for diplomacy
- d. The office for military affairs

The following Departments and Offices used by the President for his functions in general politics, coordination and technical-managerial support are to be considered general structures:

- a. The department for legal and legislative affairs (DAGL);
- b. The department for administrative coordination;
- c. The department for information and publishing;
- d. The office for internal control, transparency and integrity;
- e. The General Secretary's office;
- f. The office for the Council of Ministers;
- g. The department for managerial policies, promotion and development of human and instrumental resources;
- h. The office for the budget and regularity control of the administrative-accounting systems;
- i. The Office for State Ceremonies and Honours.

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Finally, there are 14 departments and 3 offices dedicated to public policies, in some cases with competencies that can be performed by ministries, in some cases structures that perform coordination activities between the different levels of governance and, finally, also merely symbolic policy sectors.

From the point of view of the organizational structure, therefore, there is no direct intervention of the Premier. Once again, in fact, the issue of a "light" presidency, without ministerial functions but that becomes to all effects the office for the premier's staff, is proposed in a law for the reform of public administration, the Law no. 124, 2015<sup>44</sup>.

What does, however, represent a real revolution compared to the past is the composition of the presidential staff and the appointing authority as well as its decision-making style, in particular as concerns governmental legislation<sup>45</sup> and leadership<sup>46</sup>.

Due to the characteristics of the Renzi leadership, the PM's "political direction of government" provided for in the Constitution seemed to emerge, for the first time, as a specific task of the President of the Council of Ministers. In

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<sup>44</sup> B. G. Mattarella and E. D'Alterio (eds), *La riforma della Pubblica Amministrazione*, Milano, 2017.

<sup>45</sup> C. Deodato, *Alcune considerazioni sui poteri del Presidente del Consiglio dei ministri nell'attività normativa del Governo L'evoluzione del ruolo del Premier nei Governi degli ultimi vent'anni*, in GiusAmm.it, 2014.

<sup>46</sup> M. Calise, *La democrazia del leader*, Roma-Bari 2016; S. Ventura, *I leader e le loro storie*, Bologna, 2019

the past, this function, that the Constitution entrusts to the Premier, had always remained very vague. From time to time, autonomy and the individualism of Ministers was also threatened by the interference of political parties and intra-coalitional conflicts.

Providing a unique and clear political address to the executive was, for the first months of the Renzi government, a real policy, with a specific allocation of human resources and facilities aimed at both determining and verifying the executive's goals.

Renzi was able to create a sort of 'control room' (that before him no President of the Council was able to complete in a such personal and political way) where all the President's men came from his party and where he was indeed the party leader<sup>47</sup>.

Unfortunately, however, the history of Italian governments and the difficult management of the PM's office have shown that a premier is strong only when the process of presidentialization in the three fundamental powers – party, executive and media – has been completed. The excessive personalization in an issue as important of the reform of the Constitution caused Renzi to neglect – and therefore weaken – the governance sphere, and led to his resignation in December 2016.

## 6. Conclusions

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The importance of efficiency in the Office of the Prime Minister had become over the last decade all the more urgent in that there was the need to deal with the numerous political-institutional changes coming from both inside and outside Italy. The crisis in the party system, the modifications made to the electoral system, the acceleration of the process of integration into Europe and the decentralization of the functions and tasks towards a system of local autonomy had made a restructuring of the neuralgic centre of the executive absolutely indispensable, and, therefore, also a reform that was as radical as possible of the whole apparatus of the premier. With a governance that was ever more European on one side and ever more decentralized on the other, the PM's Office was necessarily called upon to ensure the unity of the executive's actions, collaboration between its different levels of government and the full assumption of responsibility in regard to its participation in the European Union.

The main organizational objectives foreseen by the new order could be substantially found in the identification of the functions belonging solely to the Premier's office; to the consequent redefinition of the organizational structure and to the transfer of the managerial competencies to other ministries and administrations.

The so called "administrative presidency"<sup>48</sup> which has often been interpreted only as a deficit of the necessary political force, in reality has, on

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<sup>47</sup> F. Bordignon, *Il partito del capo. Da Berlusconi a Renzi*, Milano, 2014.

<sup>48</sup> A. Criscitiello, *Il cuore dei governi*, cit.

various occasions, shown itself to be a useful instrument in the hands of the Premier.

During the difficult phase of the crisis at the beginning of the nineties with Tangentopoli, for example, the Law on the organization of the government allowed the President of the Council to «verify the ability of the Italian executive to develop its own independence, when this was necessary»<sup>49</sup> and, therefore, to empower its role of direction of the general governmental politics, thus laying down the condition for a significant affirmation of the premiership.

It was, again, the crisis in the political parties that led a technical President of the Council, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, to act in a significant way for the reorganization of the PCM, by writing up the internal regulations still in use today.

On the other hand, the two premier party leaders with the longest lasting governments, Silvio Berlusconi and Matteo Renzi, who might seem to share the fact that they both nominated a very personalized PCM, in reality present a lot of major differences.

On the contrary to what one would expect, Berlusconi used the instrument of “administrative presidency”, that is, the presidential decrees, several times, through which he tried to make organizational changes in the running of the core executive, making the most possible advantage of the 1999 reform. Furthermore, he nominated high bureaucrats as the heads of various structures in direct internal collaboration with the PM's Office, and in very important posts such as the General Secretariat.

On the other hand, Matteo Renzi, despite the strong reformist vocation of his executive, did nothing to change the organization of the PCM he inherited from the preceding executives. To note, however, is one important difference: all the top management positions at the PM's Office, were from his party and his closest political entourage. This obvious politicization of his core executive led us to believe that Renzi, especially in the first months of his government, could do away with the «administrative presidency» model in order to build a «transformational presidency» based on a strong leadership, that could profoundly change the status quo. But, paradoxically, Renzi failed to change the Constitution precisely because of a highly personalized referendum.

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<sup>49</sup> G. Amato, cit.