



**Partecipazione e Conflitto**  
\* *The Open Journal of Sociopolitical Studies*  
<http://siba-ese.unisalento.it/index.php/paco>  
**ISSN: 1972-7623 (print version)**  
**ISSN: 2035-6609 (electronic version)**  
**PACO, Issue 8(1) 2015: 167-189**  
DOI: 10.1285/i20356609v8i1p167

Published in March 15, 2015

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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### PARTY ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

*Formal distribution of power between national and regional levels in Italian political parties (1991-2012)*

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**ABSTRACT:** In the last 20 years an increasing number of scholars have centred their attention on the relationships between party national structures and party sub-national branches. A relevant part of the specialized literature has interpreted party change as the by-product of the denationalization of party politics. The aim of this contribution is to investigate to what extent eight relevant Italian parties have followed patterns of organizational change, after the reforms of the municipal, provincial and regional election systems; and the process of devolution of administrative powers begun during the Nineties. By focusing on two analytical dimensions (the level of involvement and the level of autonomy of party regional units), we analyse diachronically continuity and change in party formal organization, through an in-depth analysis of the statutes adopted from 1992 to 2012.

**KEYWORDS:** Denationalization, Italian political parties, Organizational change, stratarchy.

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## **1. Introduction**

Literature on organizational change has been overlooked for a long time in the mainstream analysis of political parties, which has focused on different aspects of party behaviour, role and functions in contemporary liberal-democracies. Furthermore, most of the studies have paid little attention to different theories and approaches interested in the analysis of the relations between organizations and their environment. In the last decade, however, an increasing number of scholars have focused on the relationships between party national structures and party sub-national units. The theme has been addressed through different lenses. On the one hand, modifications in the allocation of powers, competences and resources at different party layers have been interpreted as the resultant of the institutional reforms adopted by European countries, towards more decentralized governmental settings. On the other hand, the strengthening and progressive autonomization of sub-national party bodies have been considered as the by-products of the shift from a hierarchical to a stratarchical organizational template in contemporary parties.

The aim of this contribution is to investigate to what extent Italian parties have followed patterns of organizational change, by experiencing significant shifts of intra-organizational power in terms of reciprocal autonomy between the central (national) and the sub-national (regional) level. At the EU level, the Italian case presents a number of peculiarities. In fact, during the Nineties, a process of administrative and electoral reforms ran parallel to the radical renewal of domestic party politics, after the collapse of the s.c. First Republic. By focusing on organizational variables, we analyse diachronically continuity and change in 8 party organizations, from 1992 to 2012. We expect to find significant modifications in the involvement of regional party delegates/officers at the national level as well as in the degree of autonomy accorded to the regional party.

## **2. Denationalization, organizational tendencies and party change**

Formal institutions (Chhibber, Kollman 2004), as well as social cleavages (Bartolini, Mair 1990; Caramani 2004), have been conceived as alternative possible causes of the "denationalization" of party politics (Hopkin 2003; 2009). However while theories and approaches based on the latter have proved substantially inadequate to explain the re-emergence of territorial politics in well-established democracies, those informed by the former analyse inappropriately the relationship between institutional settings and

political dynamics, as if they were watertight compartments (Hopkin 2009). In both cases, the role played by political parties has been neglected.

With little exceptions<sup>1</sup>, scholars devoted little attention to the analysis of state-wide parties' strategies toward decentralization; as well as to party organizational change as a consequence of decentralizing processes. During the past 20 years, while authority over crucial policy domains and administrative competences has shifted from the national level to intermediate institutions, the hierarchical party organizational paradigm – which had historically characterized traditional state-wide parties – has been progressively replaced by a more flexible stratarchical approach (Katz, Mair 1995; Carty 2004), based on the devolution of increasing quotas of power and decision-making autonomy to party sub-national structures (Bratberg 2010).

Party literature confirms that State institutional architecture is expected to influence, to different extents, party organizational arrangements (Deschouwer 2003). While in unitary States parties are expected to present well identifiable, centralized organizational profiles (Allern, Saglie 2012), in federal and regional States the search for the core locus of party powers may reveal more difficult. The relevance of sub-national politics may vary greatly, by conditioning parties' organizational strategies<sup>2</sup>. In highly differentiated (also in terms of cultural/societal homogeneity) territorial units parties should opt to a diversification of their organizational structures and electoral strategies; while integration and uniformity in party articulation, governance and political alliances should result more effective in less heterogeneous polities (Van Biezen, Hopkin 2006).

But the strengthening and progressive autonomization of sub-national party bodies have also been interpreted as the by-products of a shift from hierarchical to stratarchical organizational template in contemporary parties. By building on S. Eldersveld's (1964) pioneering work, scholars have focused on different aspects of intra-party relationships along territorial-functional axis. While some authors suggest that parties have become more stratarchical as a consequence of the cartelization process (Katz, Mair 1995), other consider stratarchy as a continuum of structures whose configurations rest on intra-organizational arrangements (Carty 2004; Bardi, Ignazi and Massari 2007); or as a specific model of party organization (Bolleyer 2012). Drawing on Carty's franchise party model (2004) – which relies on the idea that stratarchy and hierarchy coex-

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<sup>1</sup> See Maddens, Swenden 2009; Hopkin 2003; 2009; Bratberg 2010; Fabre 2010; Verge 2013; Calossi, Pizzimenti 2014

<sup>2</sup> In particular, depending on (1) the level of interconnectedness of the different institutional layers; (2) the degree of asymmetry among regions and (3) the degree of autonomy accorded to regions (Deschouwer 2006).

ist in every party organization with different configurations – here we refer to stratarchisation as the process by which the national party and its sub-national articulations become reciprocally autonomous, albeit integrated on the basis of specific intra-organizational arrangements, in performing crucial functions and activities. While the national party restrains its control over the sub-national articulations to a limited set of political and organizational choices meant to guarantee the whole integrity of the party, sub-national articulations are free to determine most of their organizational structures, functions and political strategies, by exercising autonomous powers and prerogatives.

In our opinion, the two processes (institutional devolution and stratarchisation) intertwine. In what follows we will test this assumption on the Italian case.

### **3. The Italian case**

At EU level, since the beginning of the Nineties, an increasing number of States have promoted the introduction/empowerment of sub-national levels of government (Keating 1997; Hooghe, Marks 2001). This process enhanced the salience of intermediate institutions (Lanzalaco 1998; Seravalli, Arrighetti 2001) as political arenas and forced national parties to re-think and adapt their electoral strategies and organizational profiles to tackle the new challenges of decentralization (Hopkin 2003; Roller, Van Houten 2003; Van Biezen, Hopkin 2006; Hopkin 2009; Bratberg 2010). Within the European framework, the Italian case presents a number of peculiarities (Ignazi et al 2013). In Italy, the regional level of administration and government, which was formally included in the 1948 Constitution, was not implemented until 1970 because of the strong reluctance of the political class. In particular, the Christian Democrats (DC), the predominant party until the Nineties, opposed to regionalization as it could hinder country's post-war reconstruction (at that time coordinated from the centre); moreover, regionalization could favour the Communist Party (PCI), given the existence of a strong concentration of electoral support in the regions situated in the centre of the country (the so-called "red belt"). Beginning with the 1980s, the worsening of the North-South socio-economic divide and the increasing discontent towards the central State were elements in the success of the independence movement of Northern League (LN), which ultimately had a role in the collapse of the DC<sup>3</sup> and, consequently, of the First Republic.

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<sup>3</sup> In the first half of the 1990s, Italy experienced a massive party realignment; at the same time major changes occurred, at least apparently, in important structural aspects of the party-system. In general these transformations were attributed to a number of different factors: a) the collapse of International

Parties born after the 1992-1993 political earthquake had different positions on regionalization, whose importance dramatically increased after the LN had become a relevant actor at national level by imposing the “federalist question” (Diamanti 2003) in the political debate. However, it would be questionable to argue that the electoral and administrative reforms carried out in the Nineties were the consequence of changes in centre-periphery dynamics (Hopkin 2003). Rather, reforms were the by-product of a more complex set of concomitant causes<sup>4</sup>.

The electoral reforms launched in 1993 had positive effects on the devolution process. The introduction of the direct election of mayors and presidents of provinces (1993) and presidents of regions (1999), and the contextual provision of increased powers over their executives and the legislative assemblies enhanced the relevance of sub-national politics. Furthermore, the strengthening of sub-national governments was confirmed by important administrative changes, carried out by the Centre-Left governments (1996-2001)<sup>5</sup>.

In parallel to the denationalization of politics, the prevailing pyramidal and top-down party organizational model (Bardi, Morlino 1994) started decomposing. Evidences raised by a number of empirical studies on the Italian parties<sup>6</sup> have shown how, notwithstanding the existence (at least on paper) of formal party structures at the regional level, Italian parties maintained a highly centralized/top-down profile until the end of the Nineties (Ignazi et al 2013). In a recent volume on centre-periphery relations in the Italian parties edited by Ignazi, Bardi and Massari (2013), the authors argue – on the

Communism and its impact on electoral alignments; b) the exposure of Italy’s widespread system of political corruption; c) the country’s fiscal crisis at a critical time in the process that eventually gave birth to the Euro; and d) a referendum that forced radical changes in parliamentary elections rules. All of these factors culminated at the same time and at least some of them had mutually reinforcing effects.

<sup>4</sup> Transformations were attributed to a number of different factors: a) the collapse of International Communism and its impact on electoral alignments; b) the exposure of Italy’s widespread system of political corruption; c) the country’s fiscal crisis at a critical time in the process that eventually gave birth to the Euro; and d) a referendum that forced radical changes in parliamentary elections rules.

<sup>5</sup> The so-called Bassanini acts, (1997 and 1998) expanded regional competences, successively increased through the 2001 reform of Title V of the Constitution (L. Cost. 3/2001), which introduced a form of cooperative federalism between the State and the regions, by assigning to the latter more legislative powers. The new institutional setting designed by the Centre-Left majority, without the support of the opposition, was considered still State-centric by the LN. The modification of the constitutional chart advanced by the Berlusconi government in 2005 was meant to extend regional legislative powers to key policy domains (such as education, police), to introduce a federal Senate and a regionally based fiscal regime. These measures were approved by Parliament but were not confirmed by the required referendum the following year. As a result the matter is still regulated by the Centre-Left’s 2001 reform.

<sup>6</sup> See Baccetti 1997; 2007; Poli 2001; Bertolino 2002; Bardi et al. 2007; Ignazi et al. 2010.

basis of the data and informations gathered in 6 Italian regions, about 9 national parties – that the progressive autonomization of local politics intertwined with high intra-organizational differentiation and a deep modification in the links between the three “faces” (Katz, Mair 1993) of political parties. Building on Carty's approach, Ignazi et al (2013, p. 14, our translation) maintain that “[it] proves extremely helpful to analyse the process of formation and institutionalization of parties in multi-level systems, with particular regards to the regional dimension”. These interconnected tendencies had emerged also in a previous study, by the same authors, aimed at validate the hypotheses formulated by Katz and Mair (1994). The results of the empirical analysis coordinated by Bardi, Ignazi and Massari on Italian parties, from 1991 to 2006, showed that (Ignazi et al 2010, p. 214):

[...] the general trend in the organizational evolution of political parties is largely confirmed [...]. The dominant quota of state financing in spite of members' revenues, the centralization of power in the hand of the executives and leaderships, the parliamentarisation and increase of staff and resources in the hands of parliamentary groups, and the persisting irrelevance of the membership role are all common features of contemporary Italian parties.

These evidences, which remind to a tendency toward cartelization, confirmed the profound transformation undergone by the Italian political parties. Although alternative explanations of this phenomenon have been raised by specialized literature, in our opinion the denationalization of politics (resulting from institutional reforms) has significantly contributed to party organizational change. As Massari (2013, p. 315, our translation) puts in “[...] as far as personal parties and federalism stand out, the distinction between centre and periphery blows up. [...] The territory is the new hegemonic centre” of Italian politics.

#### **4. Purpose and method**

Our analysis focuses on changes in the formal profile of Italian parties, with specific attention to the distribution of power between the national and the regional levels of party organizations. We are interested in verifying to what extent Italian parties have followed patterns of organizational change, showing significant shift of intra-organizational formal power in terms of reciprocal autonomy between the central (national) and the sub-national (regional) level (Allern, Saglie 2012). Albeit stratarchical

tendencies in party organizational change have been observed in most Western democracies (Katz, Mair 1993; 1995; Carty 2004; Bolleyer 2012), we hypothesise that:

H1: in Italy the paradigmatic shift towards party stratarchisation has been reinforced by the institutional reforms cycle begun at the beginning of the 90s, which has brought to a massive decentralization of competences from the State to the regions.

Put differently, we are interested in observing similarities and variance in the involvement of regional party officers/delegates at the national level as well as in the degree of autonomy accorded to the regional party, among parties belonging to different political cultures and characterized by different organizational imprinting.

By focusing on 10 organizational variables we analyse diachronically stability and change in party organization of 8 Italian relevant parties, through an in-depth analysis of the statutes adopted from 1992 to 2012. The study of the official story of political parties as a means to understand organizational change (Katz, Mair 1992; Fabre 2010; von dem Bergen et al. 2013) has often been considered controversial: most of the criticisms deny the possibilities to obtain a realistic picture of the “effective” dynamics which bring to party change, drawing exclusively on party statutes, balance sheets etc.. Interviews, questionnaires and data provided directly by political parties are usually seen as indispensable to understand party profiles and activities. We do consider such tools and sources as extremely valuable too. However, due to the overall objective of this contribution, our long-standing personal experience “on the field” studying the Italian parties bring us to privilege the analysis of their official story. Especially in a 20-years diachronic perspective, any attempt to gather reliable and complete data and informations on “real” party organizations, in particular at sub-national level, would not guarantee any reliable cue to work with (Ignazi 2013). Despite statutes, programs, balance sheets do not consent an in-depth analysis of intra-party life, yet they represent precious sources for comparative studies (Smith, Gauja 2010). Knowing the official story of a party is a pre-condition to assess the validity of the information gathered from different sources. Party statutes can help identifying the horizontal/vertical distribution of organizational powers between party organs and party layers: they are the “map” which condense the representation of intra-party authority, the degrees of freedom accorded to party articulations, the role assigned to party members etc. (Katz, Mair 1992; von dem Bergen et al. 2013).

Strategies to code party organizations already exist, but few provide analytical categories suitable for our purpose. Richard Katz and Peter Mair's *Data Handbook* (1992) is a huge collection of data on party organisation but does not provide dedicated indicators to measure level of centralisation/decentralisation of parties. Kenneth Janda's *In-*

ternational Comparative Parties Project (1980) provides categories, including several variables linked to the centralisation of power. This comprehensive analysis cannot be simply updated because its categories include also sub-regional actors, which are not considered in our study, and investigates only processes at the national levels, without analysing those performed at regional ones. Thorlakson (2009), who tries to compare parties in seven different federations, assigns only one value to each party without differentiating amongst functions. Probably, of the existing coding schemes, Elodie Fabre (2010) has drawn the methodology which is the most useful for our purposes. First of all, she designs her analytical framework only with respect to regional and national levels, as the “other levels are only important in so far as they impinge on or strengthen the power of the central or regional level” (Fabre 2010, p. 346). Therefore, she concentrates her focus on two dimensions of multi-level organizations: the level of involvement of regional units in national party organs and, vice versa, the level of autonomy of regional units from the national levels. The first relates to the degree to which regional units are represented in central organs and involved in decision-making processes. The latter refers to the extent to which regional units are able to perform processes at the regional level independently from the national party.

Despite the prominent advances offered by Fabre’s analytical scheme for our analysis we see fit to make some changes to both the variables and the indicators. These changes are due to provide a more defined comparison between the two levels. In fact, for what concerns variables, while Fabre analyses different functions performed by political parties at the national and regional levels, we consider for both levels the same five variables, which are:

1. Selecting the party leader;
2. Selecting the party candidates for elections;
3. Composition of the party executive;
4. Amending the party statute;
5. Deciding the party electoral campaign strategy.

Also for what concerns the operationalization of the variables drawn from the aforementioned variables, we follow an identical rationale. In particular, we do not only consider the mere numerical presence of regional or national party officers in the party organs, but also the “rights/powers” they are entitled of. So, for all the ten variables – i.e. the five variables at the national and at the regional level – the following values are assigned:



1. A decision is taken from a party organ, exclusively composed by officers/delegates of the regional level.
2. A decision is taken by a party organ, formed partly by regional officers/delegates with voting rights
3. A decision is taken by a party organ, formed partly by regional officers/delegates without voting rights
4. A decision is taken by a party organ, where regional officers/delegates are only invited or consulted
5. A decision is taken from a party organ, exclusively composed by officers/delegates of the national level.

While value 1 represents situations of the maximum level of concentration of power at the regional level, and value 5 represents the maximum level of power for the national organs, intermediate values represent situations of prerogatives shared between the two levels. A complete view of all the variables and values is offered in the following tables (See Appendixes 1a and 1b). Thus, parties which receive for the variables of the Involvement dimension a higher number of values close to 5 are those which do not guarantee any roles for the regional levels to influence the functions of the national bodies. On the contrary, parties which receive lowest values are those which grant the highest prerogatives for the regional levels to influence the functions performed at the national level. A similar assumption can be addressed for the variables of the Autonomy dimension. Parties that receive an average value close to 5 are those that foresee a top-down criteria inside their organization with more powers assigned to the national level in influencing the regional level. On the contrary average values close to 1 depict parties which grant high levels of autonomy to their regional levels. We consider the first and the last statute adopted in the period (Tot= 16) by the 8 parties analysed: Rifondazione Comunista (PRC); Partito Democratico della Sinistra-Democratici di Sinistra (PDS-DS); Partito Popolare Italiano-Democrazia è Libertà; Forza Italia; Alleanza Nazionale; Lega Nord; Popolo della Libertà.

## **5. Dimension 1: Involvement**

The Selection of the National Leader of the party (SNL) is a key variable to analyse the level of involvement of regional party delegates/officers at the national level and it represents one of the core variables to frame the functioning of the intra-party chain of delegation and accountability. The observed parties show different values if we consid-

er the left-right axis, while inter-party variance is lower within the left-wing and right-wing blocs (see Tab. 1).

On the left side of the spectrum, both the PRC and the PDS-DS, the heirs of the communist organizational tradition, present tendencies to a decrease in the ex officio involvement of regional representatives within the organ in charge of the selection. While the 1996 statute of the PRC contemplates the ex officio presence of the Regional Secretaries within the Political Committee, the last by-law of the party does not provide any specific provision. The DS introduces primary elections opened to party members for the SNL: the party thus abdicates the principle of intra-party delegated democracy in favour of a direct appeal to the membership, which is an indicator of a tendency to stratarchy as it is widely recognized by literature<sup>7</sup>. The same applies for the PD, whose foundation myth relies on primary elections opened also to voters: this plebiscitary mechanism weakens the intra-party chain of delegation from below<sup>8</sup>.

The post Christian-Democratic parties, the PPI and DL, show an identical score of 2, which stands for a selection made by the National Congress – an organ mostly composed by sub-national party delegates. Parties of the right do not show neither inter-nor intra-party variance, in time, as all of them receive a score of 2. However, for all these parties a clear identification of the leader with single, charismatic personalities emerge during the whole period. This is particularly true if we consider Silvio Berlusconi and his undisputed leadership as Party President of both FI and the PDL (the party born in 2009 after the merge between FI and AN)<sup>9</sup>; but this de facto plebiscitary tendency characterized also Umberto Bossi's leadership over the LN, at last until the 2012 statute<sup>10</sup>; and, to a lesser extent, the presidency of Gianfranco Fini in AN.

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<sup>7</sup> We assign to primary elections a score of 5 as it stands for a situation where regional organs are not involved in the process of selection.

<sup>8</sup> More in detail, the process for the selection of the national leader follows a two-stages multi-level process. In the first one, party members vote for provincial delegates associated to the candidates to the national secretariat: the elected delegates entered Provincial Conventions, where the lists of candidates to the National Convention are presented and voted. The National Convention is formed by 1000 provincial delegates and a limited number of ex officio party officers. The Convention determines the number of the eligible candidates (max 3) to the post of National Secretary and their lists of candidates to the National Assembly. In the second stage, party members and registered voters vote for the National Secretary and his/her associated list(s).

<sup>9</sup> The National Congress of the PDL can elect the President also by a simple show of hands (art. 15).

<sup>10</sup> The art. 14 of the statutes establishes that "Umberto Bossi is the founding father of the Northern League and he is nominated Federal President for life".

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**Table 1: Involvement of regional level bodies in national level functions**

	<i>PRC</i> 1996	<i>PRC</i> 2011	<i>PDS</i> 1991	<i>DS</i> 2005	<i>PPI</i> 1995	<i>DL 2006</i>	<i>PD</i> 2008	<i>PD</i> 2010
Selection of National Leader	2	5	3	5	2	2	5	5
National Executive Organ	5	5	3	5	2	3	2	2
Selection of National Candidates	4	4	3	5	2	5	4	4
Modifying the National Statute	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	2
Definition of National Strategy	5	5	3	5	2	3	2	2
	<i>LN</i> 1998	<i>LN</i> 2012	<i>AN</i> 1995	<i>AN</i> 2006	<i>FI 1998</i>	<i>FI 2004</i>	<i>PDL</i> 2009	<i>PDL</i> 2011
Selection of National Leader	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
National Executive Organ	2	2	3	3	2	2	2	2
Selection of National Candidates	2	2	3	3	4	4	5	5
Modifying the National Statute	2	2	3	3	2	2	2	2
Definition of National Strategy	2	2	3	3	2	2	2	2

The number of regional delegates and officers who are granted an ex officio presence within the National Executive Organ (NEO) and who are provided with voting rights is a reliable indicator of the relevance of the regional layer of the party. The composition of the National Direction of the PRC is not integrated with regional representatives. Also the DS, in 2005, does not assign to regional delegates/officers reserved seats in the NEO: Regional Secretaries are present in the National Direction of the PDS, without voting right. This type of organizational setting is set by the 2006 statute of the DL, while Regional Secretaries are empowered with the voting right in both the PPI and the PD. Among the right-wing parties, only AN does not grant the voting right to the Regional Coordinators, who are ex officio members of the organ. In the other cases regional secretaries (LN, FI, PDL) as well as regional delegates (LN) and elected personnel (FI) were all provided with the voting right.

The analysis of the process of selection of candidates to national elections (NCS) gives us a rather diversified snapshot of the organizational arrangements deemed more effective by the selected parties. While intra-party variance is limited, differences among parties are significant. Both the PDS-DS and the PPI-DL modify, in time, their organizational profile toward a more hierarchical/top-down approach. While the PDS assigns to the National Direction the power to approve the lists proposed by the Regional Directions, in the 2005 statute of the DS a specific National Electoral Commission, nominated by the National Direction, is responsible for the selection. Regional Coordinators

participates with full rights to the National Direction of the PPI, the organ in charge of SNC: in the statute of DL, each party level is responsible for the selection of candidates. The PD receives a score of 4 as the Coordinamento Nazionale approves the lists proposed by the regional level<sup>11</sup>. The same applies also to the PRC, as the National Direction analyses the lists formulated by the provincial federations on the basis of the proposals advanced by the National Committee and the Regional Committees. Parties of the right do not show significant intra-party variance in the SNC. The PDL shows the most hierarchical profile, as the National President is entitled to choose candidates, after consulting the Presidency Bureau: in the 2009 statute the lists are ratified by the National Coordinators, while in the following by the National Secretary. Also in FI the National Presidency is the organ provided with the competence of SNC, after having consulted the Regional Coordinators. On the contrary, the involvement of the Regional Secretaries and regional representatives is massive for what concerns the LN, as the Federal Council is mostly composed by regional officers and delegates. In AN the National Direction is the selecting organ, thus it is scored 3 (see above).

In all the analysed parties the organ in charge of modifying the national statute (ANS) is, in general, a national deliberative organ (the National Congress for PRC, DS, PPI, FI, PDL; the Federal Congress for the LN; the Federal Assembly for the DL), thus an organ elected by the sub-national layers of the party and largely composed by sub-national delegates. Only the PDS and AN made exception: in both cases, an ex officio presence within the competent organs was accorded to the Regional Secretaries who were not already elected members, without voting right (Score 3).

The definition of the political strategies (NCS) is a core function for all parties: the composition of the organ (at least formally) in charge of setting the "line" of the organization is a predictor of its hierarchical/stratarchical tendencies. As the analysis of the statutes shows, the National Executive Organ is the organ which defines the NCS: thus the scores are the same as those assigned for the variable NEO. The only exception is represented by the PDL, that shows intra-party variance (from 2 to 5): the first statute of the party empowers the National Direction with the task of defining the political strategies, while successively a monocratic organ (the National Secretary) is in charge of this task

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<sup>11</sup> A limited quota of candidates is directly appointed by the National Secretary, who chooses also the top-ranked candidates.

## 6. Dimension 2: Autonomy

Differences between centre-left and centre-right parties emerge with respect to the procedures set for the selection of the regional leader (SRL): while the latter show a more centralized approach, the former (but the PD) guarantee the autonomy of the regional level (Tab. 2). The statutes of the PRC foresee that the Regional Political Committees (i.e. the largest regional party organ) choose the Regional Secretary: none parliamentary neither any member of the national bodies of the party are ex officio members of the organ. According to the 1991 statute of the PDS the Regional Secretary is directly elected by Regional Committees, but also the National Direction can propose candidatures. In 2005 the statute gives complete autonomy to the Regional Unions of the DS in choosing their own statutes and thus their own methods in performing such a function. The 1995 statute of the PPI states that the Regional Secretary is elected by the Regional Congress, but it is also foreseen that members of the National Council are ex officio delegates in the Regional Congress, without voting rights. In the 2006 standard model of regional statutes of the DL the Regional Coordinator is elected by the Regional Congress, within which National and European parliamentarians, elected in the region, have an ex officio presence. In the statutes of the PD the election of the Regional Secretary is regulated by regional by-laws, as it is stated by the national statute, but the direct election through open primaries is a binding principle. Thus the regional bodies do not play any role in electing their regional leaders and the regulation in, in practice, decided by the national statute.

The 1998 and 2012 statutes of LN assign to the National Congress<sup>12</sup> the prerogative to elect the Regional Secretary. Parliamentarians and the Federal Leader of the Party are ex officio member of the Congress. The statutes of FI indicate that the Regional Leaders are directly nominated by the National Leaders, thus no role is foreseen for the regional levels. In 2006 the new statute of AN introduces the election of the Regional Coordinator by the Regional Assembly, where many officers of the national level party are ex officio members. The PDL seems to adopt the FI's organizational scheme and assigns to the party President the power to choose the Regional Coordinator.

Among centre-left and centre-right parties it is possible to observe differences in the composition of the Regional Executive Organ (REO). In the PRC the executive body of the regional level is the Regional Secretariat, an organ elected by the Regional Political

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<sup>12</sup> The Lega Nord, in coherence with its regionalist approach, defines as "National Sections" all the units which form the party. Thus the "National Congress" barely correspond to what the other parties define as "Regional Congress".

Committee that does not have any ex officio members of the national level. Also the PDS-DS follow the same organizational principle as their Regional Directions do not include national officers. This is not the same for the PPI-DL. This is not the same for the PPI and the DL, where national parliamentarians, whereas elected in the region, are members, without voting rights, of the regional executives. The party originated by the merge between DS and DL, the PD, is more similar to the DL structure. Indeed, also in the PD the parliamentarians are ex officio members of the Regional Directions, with full voting rights. The PDL foresees the presence of parliamentarians within its Regional Executive organ, as also FI and AN were doing. But differently to its predecessors, the PDL does not guarantee any voting rights to MPs. The LN appears to be consistent with its demands for autonomy and does not grant any role to the national bodies in defining the composition of the regional executive.

**Table 2: Autonomy of regional level bodies in performing regional level functions**

	<i>PRC</i> 1996	<i>PRC</i> 2011	<i>PDS</i> 1991	<i>DS</i> 2005	<i>PPI</i> 1995	<i>DL</i> 2006	<i>PD</i> 2008	<i>PD</i> 2010
Definition of Regional Leader	1	1	1	1	3	1	5	5
Regional Executive Organ	1	1	1	1	3	3	4	4
Selection of Regional Candidates	1	1	2	1	3	4	5	5
Modifying the Regional Statute	5	5	2	1	3	5	1	1
Definition of Regional Strategy	1	1	1	1	3	3	4	4
	<i>LN</i> 1998	<i>LN</i> 2012	<i>AN</i> 1995	<i>AN</i> 2006	<i>FI</i> 1998	<i>FI</i> 2004	<i>PDL</i> 2009	<i>PDL</i> 2011
Definition of Regional Leader	4	4	5	4	5	5	5	5
Regional Executive Body	1	1	4	2	4	4	3	3
Selection of Regional Candidates	4	1	3	3	4	4	4	4
Modifying the Regional Statute	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Definition of Regional Strategy	1	1	4	4	4	4	3	3

The procedures for the selection of candidates to regional (SRC) elections vary in terms of inter-party arrangements while, diachronically, are stable in intra-party practices. The PRC and the PDS-DS share the same method in choosing their candidates for the regional elections: the national level does not play any role while the regional party, through the regional committees, has the monopoly in performing this function. Also the PPI assigns to the Regional Committee the role of selecting the candidates, but this organ is partly formed by members of the National Council: the statute of the DL

foresees the establishment, by the Regional Committee, of an ad-hoc Regional Commission. According to the statutes of the PD, the candidates to representative assemblies are chosen through open primaries. This method is set by the national statute of the party and no role is assigned to the regional units. In 1998 the regional leaders of the LN play only a consultative role, while the right to select the candidates belongs to the Federal Council: this mechanism changes in 2012, when the new statute assigns to the regional assemblies the power of selecting candidates for the regional elections. According to the statutes of AN, the Regional Coordinators can propose the names of the candidates, but the final lists are approved by the National Direction. In FI the statutes indicate that the regional candidates are proposed by the Regional Coordinators and finally approved by the Conference of Regional Coordinators, which is a national party body chaired by the President of the Party. In the PDL the procedure of selecting regional candidates is differentiated between the majority and the proportional portion of the lists. For what concerns the former, the decision is taken by the Office of Presidency, which is a national organ, after consulting the regional coordinators.

Few Italian political parties foresee the presence of regional statutes, a part the PD and its founding parties (ARS). Every Regional Union of the DS performs an autonomous role in defining its regional statute, while in 1991 a consultative role is reserved to the National Direction. In the PPI the responsibility of approving the Regional Chart is given to the Regional Committees, to which also members of the national council of the party participate without voting rights: in the DL this prerogative shifts to the Federal Assembly, a national organ of the party. The Regional Assemblies of the PD, which are composed by regional officers, have the power to draw up the regional statutes. None of the statutes of all the other political parties specify the presence of regional statutes. Even if such a provision is out of our coding scheme we interpret this organizational choice as a manifestation of party centralization. Thus, with respect to this variable PRC, LN, AN, FI and PDL are scored 5.

The definition of the political strategies (RCS) is a core function for all the levels of political parties. Thus, the composition of the organ in charge of setting the "line" of the organization is a predictor of its hierarchical/stratarchical tendencies. For all the analysed political parties this crucial power is assigned (at least formally) to the regional executive organs: thus the scores are the same as those assigned for the variable REO. This is also a variable without any relevant diachronic variance, since none of the party change its REO's composition in the analysed time-span.

## 7. Conclusions

The aim of this contribution was to analyse to what extent 8 Italian parties have followed patterns of organizational change towards more decentralized party models and have experienced significant shifts of intra-organizational power in terms of stratarchisation – in reciprocal autonomy between the central (national) and the sub-national (regional) level. As Italy – like most European countries – has experienced institutional reforms oriented to the regionalization of relevant functions and policies, the “denationalisation” of party politics has become a crucial research field. Our purpose was to verify empirically – through the coding of party statutes – whether the most relevant Italian parties have modified their formal organizational architecture toward less hierarchical/centralized settings.

By aggregating the values assigned to the different parties, it is possible to notice which variables present the highest level of involvement/autonomy of the regional level (values closer to 1) and those with the lowest level of involvement/autonomy (values closer to 5). The ideal-typical denationalized/stratarchical party should be scored 5 for the variables on the involvement dimension and 1 for the variables on the autonomy dimension. The analysis of the results for both dimensions gives us a snapshot of the formal organizational profile of the Italian parties that does not fit with our hypothesis.

For what concerns the Involvement of regional delegates/officers at the national level, the mean value of the variables is 2,86. Table 3 shows that the selection of candidates for national elections (SNC) is the only variable which presents a value in line with the denationalised/stratarchical model. On the contrary, amending the national statutes is the procedure which registers the highest level of involvement of regional level. The other three variables assume half-way values.

Also the analysis of the variables along the dimension Autonomy seems to not confirm the hypothesis. Three variables out of five present values that indicate a strong control of the national level on the regional level, in line with the organizational legacies of the Italian parties (Bardi, Morlino 1994; Ignazi, Bardi, Massari 2013).

However, by analysing the organizational evolution of each party considered, some differences emerge. In fact, the left-wing parties (PRC and PDS-DS) show, in time, a tendency to denationalization/stratarchy – by increasing the mutual autonomy of the national and the regional levels. This tendency is shared also by some right-wing and centrist parties (LN, AN and PPI-DL), but the mean values are still far from the expected ones. It is also interesting to analyse the similarities/differences between the organizational profiles of the PD and the PDL – the parties born after the merge of DS and DL and FI and AN respectively – and those of their founders. The PDL presents an organi-

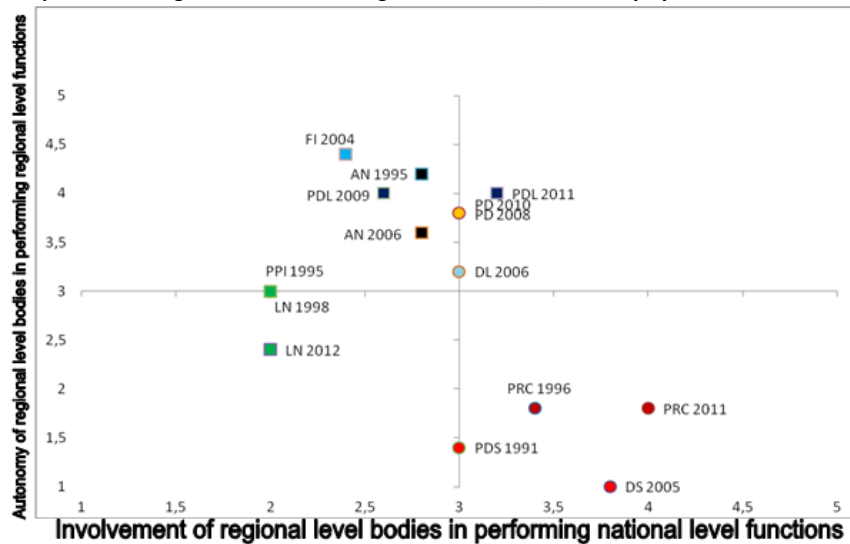


zational profile in line with those of its predecessors, as FI and AN had similar formal rules. The organization of the PD is closer to that of the DL, even if the new party “inherited” from the DS the mechanism of primary elections to elect the national leader. The variance amongst the organizational profiles of Italian political parties is well exemplified by Graph. 1.

**Table 3: Involvement and Autonomy: Mean Value**

<i>INVOLVEMENT</i>	<i>MV</i>
Selection of National Leader	2,81
Selection of National Candidates	3,69
National Executive Organ	2,81
Modifying the National Statute	2,19
National Candidates Selection	2,81
<i>AUTONOMY</i>	<i>MV</i>
Definition of Regional Leader	3,69
Selection of Regional Candidates	2,50
Regional Executive Body	2,81
Modifying the Regional Statute	3,94
Definition of Regional Strategy	2,63

**Graph 1 Positioning of Italian Parties along the Involvement/Autonomy Dimensions**



The distribution of the Italian political parties in the different quadrants of the scatterplot allows us to propose a typology of parties with regards to the distribution of formal power between organisational levels. Parties which have values closer to 5 on the Involvement dimension (i.e. no influence of regional level bodies on national level functions) and 1 on the Autonomy one (i.e. maximum of autonomy for the regional level bodies in performing their functions) are those that adopt a proper stratarchical organizational distribution of power. As it is showed by the figure, these are the heirs of the Communist party (PDS-DS and PRC). Parties which have lower values for both the dimensions (only the Lega Nord) are those which assign more powers to the regional levels and thus are the most denationalised parties (similar to those defined as federations by Bolleyer 2011). On the contrary, parties which have values higher than 3 in both the dimensions – only PDL 2011 – are those which do not assign a relevant weight to regional parties and thus are the most nationalised ones (thus, they have an organisational profile which is completely opposite to that of denationalised parties). However, most of the Italian parties (PD, PPI-DL, FI and AN) grant low degrees of autonomy to their regional branches but foresee high degrees of involvement of regional officers/delegates in the national organs or in performing national functions. This fourth type of parties is the one which presents higher levels of cooperation between the national and the regional levels and can be thus named as integrated party.

In conclusion, Italian political parties have been only partially influenced, at least in their formal organizational profiles, by changes occurred at the institutional level: only the heirs of the communist tradition have proved more incline to adapt their organizations to the parallel processes of denationalisation and stratarchisation. With the exception of the LN (coherently with its declared federal profile), the other parties (FI, AN, PDL, PPI-DL, PD) have adopted organizational strategies more oriented to top-down institutionalization approaches

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**APPENDIX 1a (Involvement of regional level bodies in national level functions)**

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Scores and operational definitions</i>
Selecting National Leader (SNL)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. By a national party organ, formed exclusively by sub-national delegates/officers;</li> <li>2. By a national party organ, formed by sub-national party delegates/officers with voting right;</li> <li>3. By a national party organ, formed by sub-national party delegates/officers without voting right;</li> <li>4. By a national party organ, after consulting sub-national party delegates/officers;</li> <li>5. By national party organ, where sub-national party delegates/officers are not present;</li> </ol>
Selecting National Candidates (SNC)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. By a national party organ, formed exclusively by sub-national delegates/officers;</li> <li>2. By a national party organ, formed by sub-national party delegates/officers with voting right;</li> <li>3. By a national party organ, formed by sub-national party delegates/officers without voting right;</li> <li>4. By a national party organ, after consulting sub-national party delegates/officers;</li> <li>5. By national party organ, where sub-national party delegates/officers are not present;</li> </ol>
Composition of the National Executive Organ (NEO)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The NEO is formed exclusively by sub-national delegates/officers;</li> <li>2. The NEO is formed partly by sub-national party delegates/officers with voting right;</li> <li>3. The NEO is formed partly by sub-national party delegates/officers without voting right;</li> <li>4. Sub-national delegates/officers may only be invited to the meetings of the NEO;</li> <li>5. Sub-national delegates/officers are not present in the NEO;</li> </ol>
Amending National Statute (ANS)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. By a national party organ, formed exclusively by sub-national delegates/officers;</li> <li>2. By a national party organ, formed partly by sub-national party delegates/officers with voting right;</li> <li>3. By a national party organ, formed partly by sub-national party delegates/officers without voting right;</li> <li>4. By a national party organ, after consulting sub-national party delegates/officers;</li> <li>5. By national party organ, where sub-national party delegates/officers are not present;</li> </ol>
National Campaign Strategies (NCS)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. By a national party organ, formed exclusively by sub-national delegates/officers;</li> <li>2. By a national party organ, formed partly by sub-national party delegates/officers with voting right;</li> <li>3. By a national party organ, formed partly by sub-national party delegates/officers without voting right;</li> <li>4. By a national party organ, after consulting sub-national party delegates/officers;</li> <li>5. By national party organ, where sub-national party delegates/officers are not present;</li> </ol>

**APPENDIX 1b (Autonomy of regional level bodies in performing regional level functions)**

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Scores and operational definitions</i>
Selecting Regional Leader (SRL)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. By a regional party organ, formed exclusively by national delegates/officers;</li> <li>4. By a regional party organ, formed partly by national party delegates/officers with voting right;</li> <li>3. By a regional party organ, formed partly by national party delegates/officers without voting right;</li> <li>2. By a regional party organ, after consulting national party delegates/officers;</li> <li>1. By regional party organ, where national party delegates/officers are not present;</li> </ol>
Selecting Regional Candidates (SRC)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. By a regional party organ, formed exclusively by national delegates/officers;</li> <li>4. By a regional party organ, formed partly by national party delegates/officers with voting right;</li> <li>3. By a regional party organ, formed partly by national party delegates/officers without voting right;</li> <li>2. By a regional party organ, after consulting national party delegates/officers;</li> <li>1. By regional party organ, where national party delegates/officers are not present;</li> </ol>
Regional Executive Organ (REO)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. The REO is formed exclusively by national delegates/officers;</li> <li>4. The REO is formed partly by national party delegates/officers with voting right;</li> <li>3. The REO is formed partly by national party delegates/officers without voting right;</li> <li>2. National delegates/officers may only be invited to the meetings of the NEO;</li> <li>1. National delegates/officers are not present in the NEO;</li> </ol>
Amending Regional Statute (ARS)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. By a regional party organ, formed exclusively by national delegates/officers;</li> <li>4. By a regional party organ, formed partly by national party delegates/officers with voting right;</li> <li>3. By a regional party organ, formed partly by national party delegates/officers without voting right;</li> <li>2. By a regional party organ, after consulting national party delegates/officers;</li> <li>1. By regional party organ, where national party delegates/officers are not present;</li> </ol>
Regional Campaign Strategies (RCS)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. By a regional party organ, formed exclusively by national delegates/officers;</li> <li>4. By a regional party organ, formed partly by national party delegates/officers with voting right;</li> <li>3. By a regional party organ, formed partly by national party delegates/officers without voting right;</li> <li>2. By a regional party organ, after consulting national party delegates/officers;</li> <li>1. By regional party organ, where national party delegates/officers are not present</li> </ol>