



Bundling the bundles : overcoming policy conflict in a divided coalition'

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Panel: Coalition government and legislative bargaining

Abstract

Bundling the bundles: overcoming policy conflict in a divided coalition

How is policy conflict managed in a divided coalition? To answer this question, this paper deals with the case of Italian institutional reforms, as they are example of bundles of reforms where the different dimensions of negotiation are intertwined. It shows how these reforms can illustrate more generally three sets of coalition dynamics related to the resolution of policy conflicts: mutual trade-offs, deal expansion, and time management.

During the fourteenth legislature (2001-2006), discussions and negotiations about the Italian institutional system have come to a peak, leading to the adoption in the Parliament in 2005 of a reform modifying around 50 articles of the Italian constitution; repelled in a referendum, and the replacement of the mixed-member majoritarian electoral system adopted in 1993 by a mixed system combining PR with a majority bonus. How could an extremely heterogeneous government coalition adopt a set of far-ranging institutional reforms in the parliament, and why did the constitutional reform eventually fail while the electoral reform was adopted?

The main argument of this paper is that the very presence of four coalition partners with different priorities has led to the formulation and negotiation of an ever wider bundle of institutional reforms. First, this large bundle has been built in order to accommodate the diverging priorities and preferences of the government coalition by giving something to each party, a condition without which no deal could have been reached. Secondly, the very dynamic of tradeoffs and the anticipation of the effects of the reforms have led the reformers to include more and more provisions in the deal, showing how uncertainty and ambiguity can actually constitute useful resources for reformers. Finally, these two reforms evidence the crucial importance of time management in the final outcome of the two reforms. The electoral reform was adopted by the centre-right majority in the parliament. The constitutional reform, on the other hand, has been repelled by the voters in 2006 in a confirmative referendum in the aftermath of an alternation in power. This failed referendum can be thought as the direct consequence of the inability of the centre-right to close the deal on the constitutional reform enough time before the 2006 parliamentary elections.

« Ora vi conto tutto.
Ma tenetevi forte alle sedie.
Perché tutto si tiene, tutto si tocca, tutto si collega
Io ve lo ripeto : tenetevi forte alle sedie».
Dichiarazione di un pentito
Il Divo, 2008, regia di Paolo Sorrentino

Introduction

Coalitions have constituted a central object of study for political scientists for several decades. Overall, the attention of authors has overwhelmingly been focused on the matter of coalition formation and termination, in particular through the development of more and more precise and empirically anchored models. These have enabled to understand better and better the motivations and the strategies of parties behind the choice of joining – or leaving – a coalition (Laver 1998; Laver 2003; Laver and Shepsle 1996; Laver and Schofield 1998). Since the 2000s, the research interests linked with coalition government have considerably broadened. For instance, the issue of pre-electoral coalitions has emerged (Golder 2006). Authors have also started to focus on the issue of coalition agreements and on their influence on policy-making (Strøm and Müller 1999; Timmermans 2006). Still, a major challenge remains relatively under-covered compared to its theoretical importance: “coalition researchers have rarely focused on what occurs between the beginning and the end of coalitions, on what we may call coalition governance” (Strøm, Müller, and Bergman 2008, 9).

By definition, coalition governments are formed by several political parties putting forward different policy agendas. Moreover, it is well-known that coalitions are more frequent in countries using proportional representation, and in which political competition is structured around a multi-party system (Lijphart 1999). In such systems, it is crucial for political parties to develop specific policy platforms and electoral appeals. As a consequence, coalition governments pose a fundamental challenge in multi-party systems: the management of policy conflict in a context where parties are “standing apart and sitting together” (Timmermans 2006). This paper deals with one particular issue: the dynamics of legislative bargaining in a divided coalition, and the mechanisms leading –or not- to the resolution of policy disagreements. Through the example of a sharp policy conflict over institutional reforms unraveling in the fourteenth legislature in

Italy (2001-2006), I analyse how a deeply divided coalition with heterogeneous and conflicting interests has managed to adopt a set of far-ranging institutional reforms in the parliament.

Between 2001 and 2006, discussions and negotiations about the Italian institutional system have come to a peak, leading to the adoption in the Parliament in 2005 of a reform modifying around 50 articles of the Italian constitution; repelled in a referendum, and the replacement of the mixed-member majoritarian electoral system adopted in 1993 by a mixed system combining PR with a majority bonus. The main argument of this paper is that the very presence of four coalition partners with different priorities has led to the formulation and negotiation of an ever wider bundle of institutional reforms. In the first section, I review the existing literature on policy conflict management in multiparty coalitions. Secondly, I present briefly the Italian case and the institutional debate at stake in 2001, concerning a wide range of issues that were very salient and very divisive for the coalition partners of the Berlusconi II government. The remaining sections present the three sets of dynamics illustrating the resolution of this policy conflict. Sections 3 and 4 illustrate the dynamics of mutual trade-offs that are central in order to understand the adoption in the parliament of the two reforms. I focus respectively on the discussion on the constitutional debate and on the deal about the electoral system. In the fifth section, I show why the dynamics of deal expansion are a consequence of the complexity and ambiguities inherent to policy bargaining in a large, divided coalition. Finally, I show how the dynamics of time management are paramount in order to understand the final outcome of the two reforms.

Section 1 - Policy conflict management in multiparty coalitions

Coalition theory has long got past the premise that parties are essentially interested in office-seeking. For instance, Budge and Keman consider that parties set up “governmental arrangements which will most effectively attain their policy preferences” (1990, 43). Similarly, without denying the importance of office-seeking strategies in coalition formation, Lemieux rightly notes that “office-seeking is instrumental compared to the realization of the preferred public policies, whereas it makes no sense to consider that public policies are instrumental compared to office-seeking” (1998, 130)¹. In the remaining of the paper, I also postulate that parties are seeking to achieve policy objectives when they choose to join a coalition. As a consequence, their presence in the coalition and the success of the two reforms studied here are

¹ « On peut considérer en effet que la recherche des postes est instrumentale par rapport à la réalisation des politiques publiques préférées, alors qu’il ne fait pas beaucoup de sens de poser que les politiques publiques sont instrumentales par rapport à la recherche des postes ».

conditional on the perception of each coalition partner to achieve at least part of its policy objectives. Indeed, parties need to find a balance between the necessity to compromise for the sake of the survival of the government, and the will to avoid the implementation of policies clashing with their own preferences. Luebbert underlines a fundamental point regarding policy preferences, noting that the party leaders typically defend a small number of them, as they also value other goals, the main one being to remain the party leader (1986, 46). In other words, party leaders prioritize their policy preferences carefully, and have some blind spots or policy areas where they are more prone to compromise than others (Sections 3 and 4).

In their article on policy disputes related to issues mentioned in the coalition agreement, Timmermans and Moury identify three types of conflict resolution: imposition, compromise, and non-decision. Through the study of a series of governments in Italy, the Netherlands and Belgium, they note that governments tend to privilege compromise, taking the form of “give-and-take”, in particular for policies that are explicitly mentioned in the coalition agreement (Moury and Timmermans 2008). They remark more generally that coalition agreements are drafted precisely to reduce agency costs and facilitate policy compromise in the future (Moury and Timmermans 2013, 120). The difficulty lies in the fact that the authors of coalition agreements must weight two clashing objectives: precision and unity. The more precise the coalition agreement is, the better able it is to avoid further policy conflicts in the future. Yet, drafting more precise agreements require time and resources, and parties often choose to commit to relatively imprecise policy promises, which in practice only delay and often exacerbate conflict (Moury and Timmermans 2008). The lack of precision of the policy commitments on institutional reform proves important in the case of Italy to understand the unravelling of the coalition conflict. Moreover, the logic of “give-and-take” aforementioned is extremely present, illuminating a situation that Tsebelis has described as “games in multiple arenas (...) in which the situation prevailing in other arenas determined the payoffs of the players in the principal arena” (1990, 55).

When describing the functioning of federal governments in Belgium, Vigour identifies what she calls a “procedure of formalization of the informal” (2009, 64) in the daily management of policy conflicts, consisting in different levels of codification of rules by political actors according to the arena of negotiation. In other words, it is important to take into account the arena in which the conflict takes place in order to understand its mechanisms of resolution. For instance, the cabinet may adopt a common policy stance after informal and secret negotiations taking place among party leaders, but this stance may be challenged at a later stage when other actors get involved. Vigour notes that in Belgium, the main veto players are the parties belonging

to the coalition, whereas the rank-and-file MPs tend to have a very limited influence on policy decisions, as important issues are dealt with in the cabinet itself in an informal institution called the *intercabinet*. This “rule”, however, is not engraved in stone. In the Belgian case, the MPs appear as much less passive when it comes to constitutional disputes, or for any laws requiring a supermajority (Vigour 2009). The imbrication of the different arenas of negotiation is also an important element to take into account in the Italian case, as the MPs and the senators have different interests compared to their party leaders (section 5), an element proving decisive to explain the format of the deals. To put it differently, one can only go as far in making the assumption that parties act as unitary actors, in particular when some people in the party are going to be directly affected by the policies at stake, as it is the case when institutional reforms are the object of interest.

Moreover, the preferences of actors in a given arena of negotiation may be influenced by negotiations taking place in other arenas. This is directly related with the central argument of Tsebelis, who shows how games generally ought to be considered as belonging to “a whole number of games”, which he calls nested games (1990, 7). In other words, the outcomes of the game, the payoffs for each player, and the strategic moves used by each of them cannot be adequately explained if one only considers *one part* of the game, and not the *entire* game. Rahat is another author who has produced a particularly valuable conceptual framework related to the idea of nested games (Rahat 2004, 2008, Rahat and Hazan 2011). Analysing the (failed) reforms of Israel’s electoral system and the (successful) reform implementing the direct election of its prime minister, Rahat shows that, in contexts where the power is greatly dispersed between political actors, successful reforms are often multifaceted, combining a lot of different and potentially contradictory mechanisms, enabling coalitions to be built involving actors with potentially conflicting interests. He argues that, “constructive, multifaceted proposals must be detailed, allowing room for interpreting the political consequences of its mixed elements” (Rahat 2008, 71). Therefore, any reform focusing on one single dimension can itself be broken down into a multiplicity of small games, each of them dealing with a different element.

When studying the deal on the reform of justice and police in the 1990s in Belgium, Vigour also identifies a very important mechanism of compromise-building, namely what we could name the logic of deal expansion. She notes that “the process of elaboration of a compromise lies on reciprocal concessions, leading to the enlargement of the number of projects taken into account and to the conciliation of contrasted visions supported by different actors in

the same project” (Vigour 2009, 82)². In other words, the negotiation of a policy agreement takes very much the form of a jigsaw with no clear overview. More importantly still, Vigour underlines the fundamental ambiguity surrounding any policy compromise, as they are vested in a “plurality of meanings by actors who have contributed to it”. As a consequence, a compromise may very well “correspond only partially to what each of the co-author had envisaged” (Vigour 2009, 83).³ This idea is in line with the notion of “ambiguous agreement” coined by Palier (2005). More generally, ambiguity about the content of the reform and its consequences constitutes a resource for political actors to finalize a deal. Ambiguity and uncertainty about a reform outcome are all the more likely when the deal is complex and multidimensional. Far from preventing a deal, in the Italian case, the level of complexity has constituted a facilitator (Section 5).

Directly related to this idea, authors note that no agreement should be considered final until the sequence of negotiation is over, in that sense, “coalition politics must be understood as a series of interconnected events, or phases” (Conti and Marangoni 2014, 3). Here again, Tsebelis rises an important point when he refers to iterative games. He argues that “when a political actor is confronted with a series of decisions presented sequentially, she can consider each either as an isolated event (an object of choice per se) or as part of a sequence of choices (an intermediate choice toward a final outcome)” (Tsebelis 1990, 161). In the Italian case, this argument leads us to be particularly attentive to the issue of time management and sequence, as the final outcome is also dependent on the sequence of preceding events (Section 6).

To summarize, three elements appear as particularly paramount when analyzing the building of a complex policy agreement in a divided coalition. First, authors have insisted on the dynamics of mutual tradeoffs and on the notion of compromise that appears inescapable in such contexts. Secondly and directly related to the first argument, ambiguity and complexity seem to be consubstantial to policy deals in a divided coalition, and to facilitate agreements. Thirdly, and finally, policy conflicts should be understood as sequences in which time management is paramount when one wants to understand the final outcome of a reform. In order to take into account these three dynamics, I use the concept of bundle of reforms, which I initially developed specifically to analyze institutional reforms. Indeed, one of the main gaps of the literature on institutional system change is the tendency to study reforms “outside” of the institutional system

² « Le processus d’élaboration d’un compromis repose sur des concessions réciproques, conduisant à élargir le nombre des projets retenus et à concilier des visions contrastées soutenues par différents acteurs dans un même projet ».

³ « En temps que construction sociale et politique, un compromis est souvent investi d’une pluralité de sens par les acteurs qui y ont contribué (renforçant ce faisant son acceptation), il peut aussi ne correspondre que très partiellement à ce que chacun des coauteurs avait envisagé ».

they belong to, ignoring that they are very often part of a vast sequence of institutional reforms touching upon other dimensions of the institutional architecture. Here, the constitutional reform and the electoral reform are studied as being part of the same bundle of reforms. They can be defined as *institutional reforms linked to each other relating to at least two dimensions of the institutional architecture*. This concept can be interpreted synchronically, as reforms *belonging to a single package deal and defining the strategies, interests and moves of the political actors accordingly* (1), or diachronically, as reforms *belonging to a broader sequence beginning or finishing beyond the moment of adoption and discussion of a given reform* (2) (Bedock 2014, 26).

Section 2- The case of Italy: a fragmented coalition at odds on institutional reform

According to Fusaro, “so far as the Italian constitutional tradition is concerned, there is a long practice of weak premiers and divided cabinets, supported by fragmented, quarrelsome and intrusive ever-changing majorities, kings or presidents constantly prompted to meddle in all major political decisions” (1998, 66). This is precisely why the Italian case is particularly interesting to study policy conflicts in divided coalition. The issue of institutional reform, on the other hand has long constituted “an intimate part of the substantive struggle for political power” in Italy (Bull and Newell 2009, 43). Institutional reforms have been highly salient and divisive for two decades, making them a relevant example for the object of study at stake. The remaining of the analysis is drawn from my PhD research, and is based on 14 semi-directed interviews with politicians and experts involved in the process, as well as on the triangulation of press archives from major national newspapers, parliamentary reports and debates for the period 2003-2007. It is completed by the systematic analysis of the parliamentary debates on the electoral reform realized for my Masters dissertation.

In 2001, after a clear-cut electoral victory, Berlusconi formed for the second time a government composed by four main electoral forces and two very small parties: Forza Italia (FI), Alleanza Nazionale (AN), Lega Nord (LN), Unione di Centro (UDC)⁴, Nuovo Partito Socialista Italiano (NPSI) and the Partito Repubblicano Italiano (PRI). I will only consider the four main parties in the remaining of the analysis. Cotta notes that one of the main objectives of the Berlusconi II government is to avoid the rapid breakdown of the coalition that occurred in 1996, in particular in keeping Umberto Bossi, the leader of the Lega Nord in the government (2002, 7). Forza Italia, electorally dominant in the coalition, writes on its own a coalition agreement later

⁴ Unifying on 6 December 2002 the Centro Cristiano Democratico (CCD), the Cristiani Democratici Uniti (CDU), and Democrazia Europea.

approved by the other leaders⁵. In this coalition agreement - and as a clear sign sent to the Lega Nord - it is mentioned regarding institutional reforms that “devoluzione” will be implemented for health, instruction, training and security. The formulation is quite vague, as the rest of the document. Moreover, this coalition was ideologically quite heterogeneous and divided as illustrated by the findings of Moury and Timmermans, who show that numerous internal conflicts have arisen during the lifespan of the coalition (2008, 430). Regarding institutional reform, Ceccanti and Vassallo note that rather than the differences between left and right, the main conflicts arise *within* fragmented coalitions, including parties with polarised positions on the matter (2004, 17). To put it differently, “the veto players within each coalition” have tended to prevent change in Italy (Bull and Newell 2009, 54).

Four issues have structured the debate about institutional reforms since the 1990s in Italy: the form of government, bicameralism, electoral reform, and federalism. On the form of government, the debate opposed the “big” parties in favour of the reinforcement of the executive and the small ones – in particular the heirs of the Christian Democracy- promoting a more parliamentary, weaker executive. On bicameralism, the debate has focused on the options aiming at revising the symmetric bicameralism that has characterized Italy since 1948. Regarding electoral reform, after the replacement of PR by a mixed-member majoritarian system in 1993, many factions advocated a further reinforcement of the majoritarian character of the Italian electoral system, through abrogative referendums and parliamentary proposals. These attempts have been unsuccessful because of the opposition from small parties who fought an electoral system that would have prevented their presence in the Parliament. Finally, the debate on federalism is largely a consequence of the electoral successes of the Lega Nord. In the thirteenth legislature, between 1996 and 2001, the centre-left coalition adopted several reforms on the matter. The constitutional laws 1999/1 and 2001/2 recognised the full statutory autonomy of the ordinary regions and of the regions with special status, and also implemented the direct election of the president of the region, who gained substantial powers of direction and government. These laws were approved by a very wide majority in both Chambers. The rest of the reform of Title V, however, ended up being adopted by a very small majority of five votes by the centre-left, a few days before the end of the legislature in October 2001. This adoption “*a colpo di maggioranza*” (by the sole majority) was a first in Italian constitutional history, where the previous attempts had tried to unite opposition and majority in the constitutional reforms. This reform, finally adopted through a referendum in 2001 with 64.2% of the votes, gave considerable legislative, financial and administrative powers

⁵ « Piano di governo per una legislatura », available online:
<https://www.yumpu.com/it/document/view/15924987/missioni-strategie-e-agenda-libero/73>

to the Italian regions. It would largely influence the emergence of the package of reforms from 2003 onwards.

The institutional reforms of the fourteenth legislature are the direct consequences of the unresolved issues posed, in particular, by the 2001 reform. the Northern League started the legislature of 2001 with one, single obsession: to once again reform Title V of the Constitution after the centre-left's "fake" reform to move towards a harder, better, faster and stronger federalism: "devolution". This soon took the form of a project of law, initiated by Bossi, minister "for institutional reforms and devolution".⁶ The project aimed to give the regions "exclusive legislative competency" over four matters: health assistance and organisation, school organisation and management of the schools and training institutes, the definition of the school and training programmes of specific interest to a region, and local police.⁷ Despite the fact it had been approved in first reading in the Senate in December 2002 and in the Chamber in April 2003, there was strong evidence of the impossibility of going through with the devolution reform, clearly identified as the "toy" of the Lega, in the absence of concessions to the other parties of the majority. As a consequence, at the beginning of April 2003, the centre-right reached a new agreement on a wider project of reform "mixing" devolution with the reform of Title V, re-attributing certain exclusive competences to the state, while also implementing devolution. The commentators soon presented the agreement as a package deal, in which everyone thought he had won⁸. It was also clear that other topics, including for instance the powers of the Prime Minister were going to be included in a later version of the deal. Therefore, from the very beginning of the negotiation, the general logic governing the process of resolution of this policy conflict was clear: bundling reforms together in order to make concessions to every party.

Section 3- The dynamics of mutual trade-offs: the example of the initial deal on the constitutional reform

During the summer 2003, the centre-right coalition was hanging by a single thread, not least because of the tensions regarding institutional reforms. Not only did all of the four parties of the majority have different preferences, they also had diverging priorities on the four topics presented above. The conflict between the four components of the majority was initially resolved by four "wise men" through the construction of a bundle of reforms on the three first topics.

⁶ Disegno di Legge S.1187 and C. 3461.

⁷ As stated in the version of the text approved in the Chamber of Deputies.

⁸ La Mattina, Amedeo. "Venerdì la riforma in consiglio dei ministri, da lunedì alla Camera si vota sul testo leghista ». *La Stampa*, 8 April 2004.

Andrea Pastore for FI, Domenico Nania for AN, Francesco D'Onofrio for the UDC and Roberto Calderoli for the Lega, all of whom were senators at the time, along with a couple of experts and public servants, were put in charge of ironing out the differences within the government majority in order to present a draft of institutional proposals that could turn into a concrete text. The aim of these four “brokers” was therefore to bypass the parliamentary and government arena in an informal setting meant to limit the conflict between the main coalition partners.

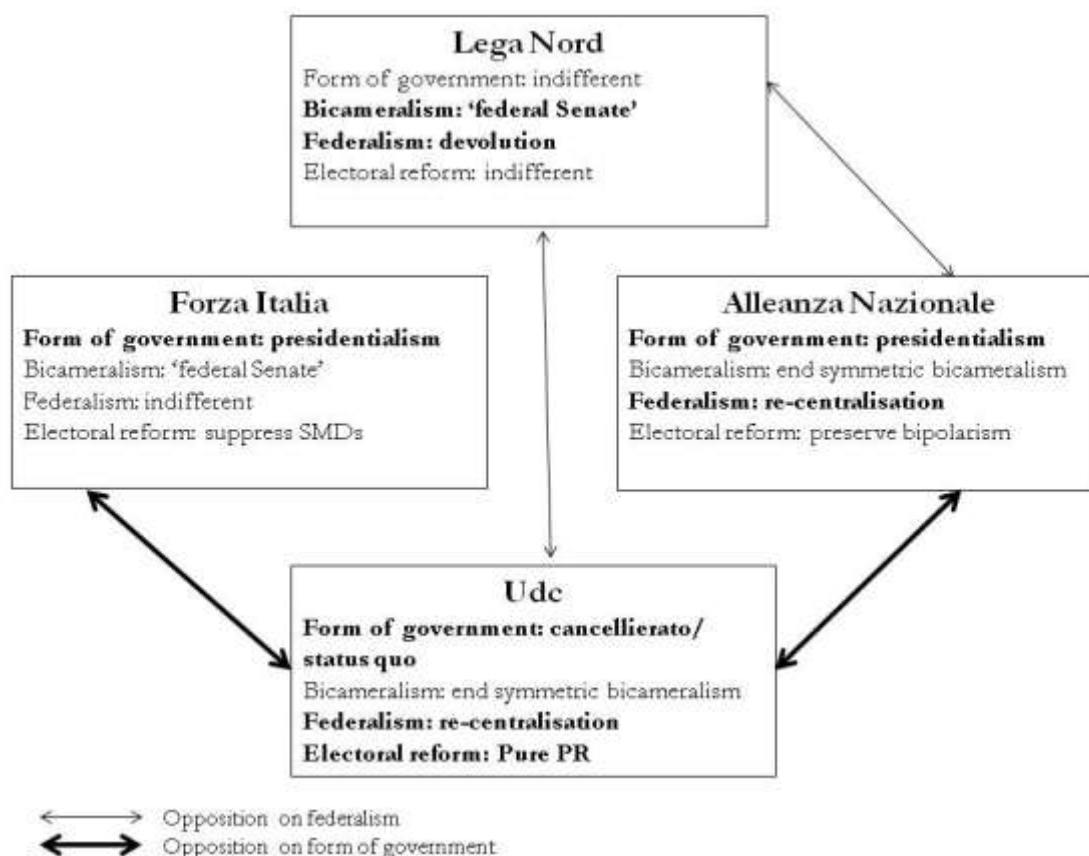
The positions of the four parties of the centre-right coalition have to be summarised (Figure 1) in order to understand the deal reached in August 2003. Internal differences on one or several of the four main topics at stake (form of government, bicameralism, federalism and electoral reform) existed within each of the four parties. Each of these four themes had different significance for each party. Each of the four parties focused only on pushing forward *its preferred position on its own priorities*, and was relatively indifferent about the outcome of reform on other issues. In other words, each of the four coalition partners had some “blind spots”, and only cared about certain elements of the deal, but not about others. Hence, a priority can be defined here as something sufficiently salient for a party to make it block the deal if its position is not taken into account. Secondly, the negotiators managed to reach a deal on a comprehensive institutional reform because each of the four parties had its own position successfully accommodated *on at least one of its leading priorities*.

Looking at Figure 1, it appears that only one theme was relatively unproblematic, i.e. the matter of bicameralism. The leaders of Forza Italia and the Lega Nord supported the so-called “federal Senate”, whereas Alleanza Nazionale and the UDC supported the end of symmetric bicameralism, although this was not a priority. As Andrea Pastore, one of the four wise men notes: “Everyone of us wanted the federal Senate”.⁹ That being said, however, two points appeared particularly divisive in that they concerned diverging preferences on themes that were a priority for several of the coalition partners: form of government and federalism. On the form of government, both Alleanza Nazionale and Forza Italia were in favour of presidentialisation or at least of a strong reinforcement of the executive, because of its post-fascist institutional tradition for the former, and because of its rhetoric on personalisation for the latter. Conversely, the UDC was more than reluctant and only supported the status quo or a limited reinforcement of the powers of the PM. On federalism, the Lega Nord, which was supportive of devolution, faced the

⁹ « Il Senato federale lo volevammo tutti ». Interview with Andrea Pastore, senator of Abruzzo between 1996 and 2013 and president of the Commission Affari Costituzionali I between 2001 and 2006, FI, 19 June 2013, at his office in Pescara.

opposition of both Alleanza Nazionale and the UDC who wanted a re-centralisation of competences as compared to the 2001 reform. Finally, electoral reform was one of the priorities of the UDC supporting the return to PR, whereas the other parties of the coalition held different positions, but did not consider the electoral reform to be a priority either. This summary illustrates several blocks, with varying alliances according to the topic in question: Lega vs. AN and UDC on federalism, FI and AN vs. UDC on form of government, UDC vs. everyone else on electoral reform. UDC was the party that had the most divergences with its coalition partners, in that its positions on its own priorities clashed with those of each one of its coalition partners on at least one matter. This would prove crucial, particularly when the electoral reform was dealt with.

Figure 1. *Initial positions in summer 2003 of the four parties of the majority on the four main institutional themes*



Note: the text in bold indicates the leading priorities of each party. For example, the priorities of the Lega Nord related to bicameralism and federalism.

The agreement of August 2003 provides a very concrete illustration of the bundling logic's facilitating role in closing a deal on institutional reforms. Indeed, the above-mentioned divergences notwithstanding, a pact on a comprehensive package of reforms was reached after a few days of discussions, accommodating the priorities of each of the coalition partners into a

single text. The agreement explicitly dealt with the matters of the form of government, bicameralism, and federalism, but not with the electoral reform.

Each party came to the table of negotiations with non-negotiable and negotiable requests, based on the positions previously mentioned. As Andrea Pastore (FI) explains, “[they prepared] a draft that took into account the positive and negative will, that is to say the yeses and the noes of the components of the centre-right coalition”.¹⁰ Indeed, the deal reached was the result of “many trade-offs of differing proportions” (Vassallo 2005, 127). To expose only a few highlights, on the form of government, in order to accommodate the presidentialist vision of FI and AN and the parliamentary vision of the UDC, a consensus was reached on an intermediary solution, i.e. the so-called *premierato*. The four parties decisively agreed upon a directly elected Prime Minister with full powers of nomination and revocation in relation to ministers, and power of dissolution. On the reform of bicameralism, the agreement indicated a new division of powers between the Chamber of Deputies, the only chamber whose confidence would have been required for the government, and the new “federal Senate”. The Chamber would be put in charge of legislation regarding matters of exclusive competency of the state, the Senate being responsible for the concurrent matters. The content of the deal on federalism is probably the best illustration of the trade-off logic of the negotiations. The Lega obtained the inclusion of devolution. However, the constitutional deal agreed upon in August 2003 contained a decisive element of re-centralisation, with the reintroduction of the principle of national interest. On the electoral reform, the UDC obtained the promise that the topic would be dealt with later in the legislature. To quote Roberto Calderoli himself: “If we faced the questions individually, problems always came out. Put all together on the table, on the contrary, even the issue of the national interest has been resolved”.¹¹ All of the other participants also clearly state the importance of each party’s ability to claim credit for one part of the reform in the achievement of a successful outcome: devolution for the League, some form of presidentialism and the national interest for AN, a stronger PM linked to a majority defined before the elections for FI, and the promise of a return to PR for the UDC (Vassallo 2005).

Yet, it would soon become clear that the August 2003 deal, although it would constitute the backbone of the constitutional reform, contained many grey zones on the specifics of the reform, which would lead to fierce debate during the parliamentary procedure (Section 5), and to

¹⁰ « E preparammo una bozza che tenesse conto delle volontà in positivo e in negativo, cioè i sì e no, dei componenti della coalizione di centrodestra. » Interview with Andrea Pastore, op. cit.

¹¹ « La novità -dice Calderoli-è che se affrontavamo le questioni singolarmente saltavano sempre fuori problemi. Messe tutte sul tavolo, invece, si è risolto anche il problema dell'interesse nazionale» Cerruti, Giovanni. « Approvato il documento finale della ‘tre giorni di Lorenzago’ ». *La Stampa*, 24 August 2003.

the expansion of the initial project concerning 29 articles of the constitution to include no less than 45 after final approval (Fusaro 2004), and with the adoption of a brand new electoral system (Section 4).

Section 4- Mutual trade-offs within a single reform: the example of the electoral reform

The previous section has shown the way in which an initial deal has been reached for the constitutional reform, through a process of ‘give-and-take’ on multiple dimensions of the reform on the policy priorities of each party. The constitutional reform can therefore be understood as a bundle of reforms. The case of the electoral reform illustrates the same dynamics within a single reform, and the manner in which the coalition partners have mirrored the same process of mutual trade-offs to create another bundle. However, it is crucial to understand that the electoral reform is also fundamentally nested in the complex game on the constitutional reform, a bundle within the bundle, making it crucial to understand the issues of time management (Section 6). In this section, I merely focus on the following puzzle: why would this reform, which at the beginning was supported only by the UDC be adopted by a divided and heterogeneous coalition with diverging interests?

The system under discussion between September and December 2005 as modelled on the Tuscan regional electoral system, substituted the single member districts with a mixed system combining PR tempered by a majority bonus, taking the form of blocked lists for vast regional constituencies. The first crucial point is the mode of attribution of the majority bonus: the coalition that obtains more votes automatically secures 54% of the seats in the Chamber, while the bonuses are attributed region by region in the Senate. Secondly, the lists are blocked: the citizen cannot express any preference vote. Thirdly, the new law introduced various thresholds of representation in order to access the distribution of seats in the Chamber: 10% of the votes for a coalition, 2% of the votes for a party that is part of a coalition,¹² 4% for lists running on their own. These thresholds are 20%, 3%, and 8%, respectively, in the Senate. Finally, the law gave the option of standing for election in multiple constituencies, enabling the parties to modify the order of the lists in a discretionary way after the vote in case of multiple elections of a single candidate.

¹² In reality, the threshold is even lower, as the “best” party in the coalition under this threshold of 2% also gets to participate in the distribution of seats.

Figures gathered by Chiaramonte and Di Virgilio (Chiaramonte and Di Virgilio 2006) give a picture of the preferences of delegates from 11 Italian parties between 2002 and 2005 on the best electoral system. Most of the centre-right parties (FI, MSFT, UDC) were in favour of pure PR, or PR with thresholds, with the notable exception of AN, which supported a majoritarian electoral system. Yet, when disentangling the different elements included in the final deal, it appears that the centre-right parties were no less divided on the electoral reform than they were on the constitutional reform (Table 1).

Table 1. *Prioritisation of the objectives on the electoral law by the parties of the centre-right coalition, 2005*

	Reinforcement of bipolarisation	Strong coalition constraint	Low thresholds of representation	Reinforcement of governability	Reinforcement of the central leadership of parties
FI	+	+	--	++	++
AN	++	++	-	+	++
LN	=	-	+	-	+
UDC	--	--	+	-	--
Others Polo	=	=	++	--	=

Note: ++ Leading priority, + secondary priority, = indifferent, - in contradiction with a secondary priority, -- in contradiction with a leading priority

Source: (Bedock 2011, 41)

Again, for the political actors of the majority, the conciliation of contradictory interests within a bundle of electoral mechanisms served to bypass the conflict between the different components. Multiple mechanisms, with potentially contradictory incentives, were introduced in the law in order to enable each of the four main parties of the coalition to anticipate the realisation of its own priorities. Such expectations were facilitated by the ambiguity of the law, which made it difficult, if not impossible, to anticipate its exact consequences. Similarly to what happened with the constitutional reform, each party tried to push forward certain priorities, and had “blind spots” that enabled the agreement to emerge. This time, it is possible to identify five main points of tension (Table 1): the bipolarisation of the political system (1); the coalition constraint, which can be defined as the incentive for parties to form a pre-electoral coalition rather than running on their own (2); the level of the thresholds of representation (3); governability, which in particular implies the examination of government stability (4); and the reinforcement of the central leaders’ powers in candidate selection (5).¹³ The motley dispositions

¹³ This analysis is a synthesis of the systematic qualitative and quantitative study of the detailed arguments on the merits of the reform during the parliamentary debates held on the electoral reform between 29 September and 13 October 2005 in the Chamber of Deputies. The main themes are the following: bipolarisation and alternation, coalitions, governability and fragmentation, thresholds of representation, selection of candidates and internal functioning of political parties (Bedock 2009, 94–105).

of the new law suddenly make sense: each of them is a concession to conciliate antonymic objectives, in particular those of AN and of the UDC, whose priorities are opposed on each and every point.

Given the different prioritisation of these five goals by the coalition partners, only a compromise which preserved the priorities of each partner enabled them to reach a consensus on the law, although, as for the constitutional reform, this was at the expense of the efficiency of the text. The general logic consists in reinforcing the bipolar character of the competition by disincentivising independent lists. The PR formula aimed to make the system more representative, the differentiated thresholds of representation were meant to reinforce the coalition constraint, the majority bonus aimed to reinforce bipolarisation, the blocked lists aimed to give greater power to the party oligarchies, etc. As a consequence, the position of AN can be explained by the conviction that the majority bonus would preserve the bipolar structure of the Italian party system, and incidentally, that the blocked lists would avoid corruption,¹⁴ whereas the concessions of the UDC on the blocked lists were based on the (not so) secret hope that the law would eventually reconstitute a third centrist pole. FI sought to get rid of the SMDs while reinforcing the power of the party leaders through the blocked lists, and imposed the majority bonus in order to preserve bipolarism as well as its leadership. As D'Onofrio, the UDC senator, explains, "the bonus, Berlusconi in the final agreement, I would not say that he has imposed it, but he has been the one to ask for it, as the head of the coalition".¹⁵ The Northern League, finally, was compelled to adopt the electoral law in exchange for final support for the constitutional reform. Two points appear clear by now, both for the constitutional and electoral reforms: these were fundamentally complex and ambiguous bundles, filled with multiple and contradictory incentives.

Section 5 – Ambiguity, complexity and the dynamics of deal expansion

In the literature on institutional change, and policy change more generally, it is usually considered that uncertainty about the outcomes of a given project prevents reform from happening. Typically, it is believed that actors tend to be unwilling to support a new arrangement even if they anticipate that they could gain from it. For instance, Pilet has documented this risk-

¹⁴ This explanation was offered by Roberto Calderoli. Iovene Bernardo. « Ecco il retroscena della porcata ». *CorriereTV*, 8 October 2013.

¹⁵ « Il premio, Berlusconi nell'accordo finale, non dico che l'ha imposto, ma lo ha chiesto lui, il capo della coalizione ». Interview with Francesco D'Onofrio, senator of Lazio (1983-1987, 1996-2008) and president of the parliamentary group from 2001 to 2006, ex-MP of Lazio between 1990 and 1996, UDC, 25 June 2013, at his home in Rome.

averse behaviour in the case of attempted electoral reforms in Belgium (2007). Shepsle calls this behaviour the “wedge of uncertainty” lying between the known and the potential outcomes (1986). Still, the Italian case shows on the contrary that uncertainty and ambiguity can constitute a resource to close a final deal, through dynamics of deal expansion leading to fight over an ever more complex and difficult to amend deal. The constitutional reform illustrates this particularly well.

The parliamentary procedure followed by the constitutional reform lasted for more than two years, from the introduction of the bill in October 2003 until its final adoption in November 2005. There have been two readings of the constitutional law in the Senate,¹⁶ and two in the Chamber of Deputies.¹⁷ However, in order to finish the parliamentary procedure before the end of the legislature, no amendments were adopted during the second reading of the text in both chambers. Therefore, three alternative versions of the text have been examined: the bill introduced by the government, the second version after the first reading in the Senate, and the final version after the first reading in the Chamber of Deputies. If one compares the final text after the parliamentary procedure with the initial text, one might note a substantial difference, both in content and in length. These successive readings have significantly altered the initial project, leading to an increase in the number of modifications to the constitution, which were not included in the preliminary deal, but also to substantial modifications of the content of the law.

What happened in the parliamentary arena during the debate on the constitution led to substantial modifications which were the result of two elements: the continuation of the conflict between the coalition partners of the centre-right, leading to further concessions in particular to the AN and the UDC (coalition logic); and the logic of self-survival of the senators, who attempted to limit the damage to themselves and to their institution during the course of the discussion (institutional logic). One of the most important modifications, namely the re-attribution to the state of an important number of exclusive legislative competences, was primarily caused by the conflict within the coalition. The “strong contextuality” (i.e., the concomitant election of the senators and of the regional councillors), on the other hand, serves as an example which illustrates how the Senate tried to maintain some ground as an institution. It shows that the preferences of actors are not identical across all arenas of negotiation.

Regarding the coalition logic, the parliamentary activism during the debate is in line with the findings of Pedrazzani and Zucchini. The two authors find that the statistical models enabling to explain the number of amendments for a given law in Italy between 1987 and 2006 depend on

¹⁶ Disegno di legge S.2544 and S.2544b respectively

¹⁷ Disegno di legge C.4862 and C.4862b respectively.

“the coalitional nature of executives” (Pedrazzani and Zucchini 2013, 705). As the authors put it, “Parliament appears to be an arena at the coalition partner’s disposal, where a second, decisive round of the cabinet decision-making process is played” (ibid.). Indeed, although the leaders of each of the four coalition parties reached an initial argument thanks to the mediation of the four “wise men”, some elements of the government proposal were unacceptable without changes for many of the parliamentarians, and in particular those of AN and UDC. The subsequent modifications during the parliamentary procedure certainly didn’t help to simplify the project, and tempered the government’s initial intention, both in terms of giving more powers to the regions, and in terms of reinforcement of the PM.

To take one example, the devolution, in particular, was an extremely problematic element. Francesco D’Onofrio (UDC), rapporteur of the law in the Senate, recalls the difficulties encountered on the topic of federalism: “I was one of the very few in my party to be in favour of federalism (...) Because in the Senate, many of those from Southern Italy heard their own voters who said ‘but this is what the Lega Nord wants, we do not want that’”.¹⁸ Many of the AN senators and MPs were equally ill at ease with devolution. These reservations eventually led to new guarantees being given to the centralist wing of these two parties, in order to pass the reform. This took the form of the re-centralisation of a series of legislative competence ranging from international monetary policy, credit, and common organisation of the market for finance to big strategic networks of transportation and navigation considered to be in the national interest (to name only a few). Some of the constitutional experts that I have spoken with consider that, if anything, the reform was a centralist one. Ceccanti explains it in a lapidary way: “Devolution (...) was fake more than anything else”.¹⁹ Similarly, Vassallo calls devolution a “myth” (2006). To summarise, the conflict *between* the four centre-right components and *within* each party led to the subsequent adoption of trade-offs, always with the aim of closing the parliamentary procedure before the end of the legislature. Yet, these trade-offs tended to contradict the initial proposal, and to make the future consequences of the constitutional reform hard to predict and hard to read, which in turn helped every partner to have the feeling to “get something” out of the reform.

¹⁸ «Io ero del mio partito uno dei pochissimi favorevoli al federalismo (...) Perché al Senato, molti dell’Italia meridionale sentivano i propri elettori che dicevano ‘ma questo lo vuole la Lega Nord, noi non lo vogliamo ». Interview with Francesco D’Onofrio, op. cit.

¹⁹ « Devolution (...) era più finta che non altro ». Interview with Stefano Ceccanti, Professor of Comparative Public Law at university La Sapienza of Rome, senator of Piemonte between 2008 and 2013, PD, 26 June 2013, at a café in Rome.

The institutional logic, although it had less influence on the final text, is perceptible in important aspects. The Senate was the institution that would have been most severely affected by the reform, with major changes not only to its functions, but also to its composition. Getting the support of the senators was the main reason behind the very long transitory norms, which would have meant that the constitutional reform, and in particular the new composition of the Senate, would only become effective in 2016. The adoption of the so-called “strong contextuality”, a proposal that actually came from the Left Democrat senator Morando, and linked the office of the senators with the office of the regional councillors, illustrates the logic of self-survival incorporated by the senators. The initial proposal made by the Senate would have implied that the “duration in office of the regional councils would have depended of the length of time in office of the senators” (Vassallo 2005, 120), whereas the final version linked the office of the senators with that of the regional councillors. This would have meant that the Senate would have been partially renewed at each regional election contest. It may seem paradoxical that the members of the “federal Senate”, who supposedly represent the regional entities, have only a link with the region by being elected on the same day as the regional councils. Yet, it soon became clear that the senators would not accept a system in which they would have not been directly elected. D’Onofrio recalls: “there was very strong pressure. Here is why in the end I succeeded in introducing the contextual election with the regional councillors: because this was the minimum point that the senators accepted. We want to be elected. We do not accept nomination by external people”.²⁰

In other words, not only was the final deal on the constitutional reform wider than the initial one because of the modification of more articles, it was also both more ambiguous and less readable in terms of its intentions and expected outcomes. However, these modifications and ambiguities were necessary to successfully take the reform home, given the institutional and coalition disagreements which had not been dealt with initially. Another paradox of institutional design is apparent in the Italian case: mutual concessions and trade-offs were necessary in order to allow a comprehensive deal to be reached, but these negotiations eventually led to the adoption in the parliament of reforms which partially clashed with the initial objectives of most of the reformers. Despite the fact that the constitutional reform initially aimed, for some, to reinforce the executive, for all, to neutralise the second chamber, and for others still to deepen federalism, the final agreement was so ambiguous and complex that, in all likelihood, it would

²⁰ « Ci fu una fortissima pressione. Ecco perché io alla fine riuscì a far passare l’elezione contestuale ai consiglieri regionali: perché questo era il punto minimo che i senatori accettavano. Vogliamo almeno essere eletti. Non accettiamo che siamo nominati degli esterni. » Interview with Francesco D’Onofrio, op. cit.

have been at odds with all of these objectives. Finally, in order to understand the final outcome of the constitutional and electoral reforms, the matter of time management appears essential. Indeed, the tricky question of the electoral reform, which was largely avoided between 2003 and mid-2005, made a dramatic entrance during the very last moments of the discussion on the constitutional reform in the Parliament, whereas the constitutional reform was eventually settled by referendum.

Section 6: Bundling the bundles: time management and the final outcome of reform

The issue of time management and its importance for reformers is illustrated in two ways by the Italian case. First, the electoral reform, happening very late in the long sequence of reform started in 2003, should be repositioned within a wider bundle of reforms as a dimension of negotiation of the constitutional reform. Secondly, the constitutional reform, despite the fact it was adopted in the Parliament in late 2005, was finally repelled by referendum in June 2006, mostly as a result of the choice of the head of the coalition, Silvio Berlusconi, to hold a referendum after rather than before the general election of 2006.

The difference between the electoral reform adopted in late 2005 and the previous failed attempts is that, in 2005, the electoral reform was considered to be the final piece of the giant institutional jigsaw that began in 2003. Moreover, rather than disproving the parsimonious self-interested models of electoral reforms (Benoit 2004), the 2005 electoral reform shows the importance of considering the existence of other institutional reform attempts when trying to understand the position of a given party during a given process of electoral system change. The re-emergence of the debate on the electoral law in September 2005 was the result of two structural elements (the long-term commitment of the UDC to a return to PR, and the under-performance of the centre-right coalition in the SMDs), and of two contingent elements (the approach of the final vote on the constitutional reform in the Senate, and the bad electoral prospects of the centre-right coalition for 2006).

The confrontation on the electoral reform began with the apparent benign will to modify the most problematic aspects of the *Mattarellum*, following the generalisation of “*liste civette*” in 2001 – a concept that can be roughly translated as “trap lists” – invented in order to bypass the compensation mechanism for small parties in the PR part.²¹ The most discussed proposal was on

²¹ When the citizens voted to elect their MPs, they had to give one vote for a candidate, and the other for a list. Each candidate was linked to a list, and thanks to a complex mechanism of compensation named the

the adoption of a single ballot.²² This choice was made, notwithstanding the repeated declarations of the UDC on the need to proceed with a much wider reform, that would lead to a return to PR.²³ Yet, the first reflections of the Chamber of deputies on the electoral reform in commission took the form of a discussion in March 2005 regarding 7 proposals of minor corrections of the *Mattarellum*, and of the adoption in June 2005 of a relatively consensual text by the same Commission. In late June 2005, the UDC MPs changed strategy, and eventually led the centre-right to widen the scope of the reform considerably, until the elaboration of a text to replace the 1993 system with a PR system with majority bonus (see section 4). In mid-2005, the constitutional reform reached the final stage in the Parliament, and the two final readings in the Chamber and in the Senate were due to take place before the end of the year. It is worth recalling that if any modification had taken place during those two readings, a further reading in each Chamber would have been required, making the adoption of the constitutional reform in the Parliament before the 2006 general elections impossible. As Nania recalls, the UDC intimidated its coalition partners, threatening to make the constitutional reform fail, if the electoral reform argument was not discussed: “Once the argument had been found on the whole reformatory package, [the UDC] (...) imposed a diktat: either an electoral law with a proportional system is made, or [they] do not vote these reforms that they had contributed, and a lot, to make”.²⁴ A few years later, Roberto Calderoli, the LN senator who elaborated the final version of the project, talked about “blackmail” in an interview, referring not only to the UDC, but also to the rest of its coalition partners: “we were blackmailed by Casini and the UDC to introduce a proportional system, by Fini who wanted the blocked lists and by Berlusconi who wanted the majority bonus”.²⁵

scorporo, the parties that performed the best in the SMDs had some of their votes subtracted in the PR part in order to give more seats to the parties that had underperformed in the majoritarian part. However, in 2001, the two biggest parties (FI and DS) had generalised the practice, which consisted of linking their candidates with “trap lists” with whimsical names in order to avoid subtracting votes from the party lists.

²² Anon., « Si profila una mini-modifica del sistema per votare alle prossime politiche fra un anno e mezzo ». *La Stampa*, 15 December 2004.

²³ Cf. Rampino Antonella. « Alla richiesta leghista di accelerare sulla devolution l’UDC contrappone il ritorno alla proporzionale ». *La Stampa*, 30 June 2004.

²⁴ « Una volta invece trovata l’intesa su tutto il pacchetto riformatore, [l’Udc] (...) pose un diktat: o si fa una legge elettorale su impianto proporzionale, o non [votano] quelle riforme che avevano contribuito, e molto, a fare. » Interview with Domenico Nania, senator of Sicilia and president of the AN parliamentary group in the Senate from 2001 to 2006, MP of Sicilia between 1987 and 2001, AN, 26 June 2013, at the Senate, Rome.

²⁵ « Fummo ricattati da Casini e dall’Udc per introdurre un sistema proporzionale, da Fini che voleva le liste bloccate e Berlusconi che voleva il premio di maggioranza ». Declarations of Roberto Calderoli in the TG1 on TV, quoted in anon. « Calderoli: “Berlusconi ci ricattò sul Porcellum, con Casini e Fini”. Ma non spiega come ». *Il Fatto quotidiano*, 2 October 2011.

The second contingent aspect that should be taken into account is the tight electoral spot in which the centre-right coalition found itself in 2005. Since its return to power in 2001, the centre-right had lost all of the intermediary elections. This came to a peak in April 2005, when the centre-right lost 12 regions out of the 14 called to vote. The centre-left was, at the time, considered to be almost sure to win, by a comfortable margin, the 2006 parliamentary elections, and was actively preparing the open primaries that would lead Romano Prodi to be appointed leader of the coalition in October 2005, with 75% of the 4.3 million votes. During September 2005, hard negotiations took place between the leaders of the centre-right coalition, in the context of major tensions between the UDC and Berlusconi, who accused the centrist leaders of being “metastasis”.²⁶ The *in extremis* closure of the deal, prior to the start of the general discussion of the text on 29 September 2005, resulted from the resignation of the first secretary of the UDC, Marco Follini, who had advocated for an exit from the centre-right coalition. Pier Ferdinando Casini, the president of the Chamber of Deputies was, on the other hand, in favour of keeping the centrist party within the Polo, and was one of the main architects of a definitive agreement on the electoral reform, by giving up on the matter of preference vote and accepting the majority bonus.²⁷ His decision also closed the argument regarding Silvio Berlusconi’s leadership of the centre-right coalition. Moreover, the pact was facilitated by pre-electoral polls suggesting that the new system advocated by the centre-right would reduce the electoral defeat.²⁸

Whereas the fact that the electoral reform discussion occurred so late in the debate is largely the reason why it was adopted in the end, the issue of time management has proven fatal for the constitutional reform. Indeed, the hard-earned constitutional reform was adopted in a final reading in the Senate in November 2005, but ultimately failed to clear the final hurdle: in June 2006, during the confirmative referendum, the “no” vote triumphed with a comfortable margin (61,3% of “no” with a 52,3% turnout), in the aftermath of parliamentary elections which were won by the centre-left. The main reasons behind this failed referendum were the successful centre-left campaign which presented the constitutional project as a product of the Lega’s blackmailing, thus threatening the unity of the country, but also the bad timing of the referendum, as it occurred after the centre-right was defeated in elections. The length of the negotiations due to the construction and the expansion of the bundle gave the centre-right a difficult strategic choice: going all-out in the parliamentary elections, or in the referendum campaign. Berlusconi made the choice to organise the referendum after the parliamentary

²⁶ Interview with Silvio Berlusconi, « Basta Metastasi nel Polo ». *Corriere della Sera*, 21 September 2005.

²⁷ Note that the centre-left had unsuccessfully attempted to propose a waiver pact for the next parliamentary elections in exchange for the blocking of the electoral reform.

²⁸ D’Alimonte, Roberto. « Per chi vince maggioranza ad handicap ». *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 15 September 2005.

elections, knowing full well that a negative result would prevent his coalition from controlling the results of the referendum. D’Onofrio summarises this choice as such:

“We went, Calderoli and I, to Berlusconi. Before the election, obviously. And we said: ‘we would like to have the referendum organised before the elections. (...) And Berlusconi told us: ‘but this way we also lose the elections!’ ”²⁹

In other words, in 2006 Berlusconi preferred to give himself and his coalition the best possible chance of winning the parliamentary elections, rather than risk losing them by a wider margin in the case of a negative referendum outcome. As a result, after the electoral defeat, the people who had actually elaborated the constitutional reform did very little to mobilise in favour of the “yes” vote. During the legislature, the constitutional reform was, for Berlusconi, the gateway between the Northern League and the government, and the way to keep LN in government. As the leader rightly considered that the referendum would be virtually impossible to win if the parliamentary elections were lost, the cause of the constitutional reform was more or less abandoned by the centre-right.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have addressed a simple, yet challenging puzzle, namely the management of policy conflict in divided coalitions. This paper has shown the crucial importance of the bundling logics in contexts where the government coalition is at odds on a given issue. The institutional reforms attempts that have taken place in Italy between 2003 and 2006 have offered interesting insights to understand the day-to-day management of conflict on salient policy issues, and have led us to identify three dynamics related to conflict resolution: mutual trade-offs, deal expansion, and time management.

Firstly, both the adoption of the constitutional and the electoral reforms *in the parliament* resulted from the ability of the elements of the majority to build a package deal enabling every actor in the coalition to “win” on at least one of its priorities. Secondly, this paper has shown how, paradoxically, and contrary to most expectations, uncertainty and ambiguity can constitute useful resources for reformers. This leads them to formulate an ever wider deal, in order to please

²⁹ « Andammo, Calderoli ed io, da Berlusconi. Prima dell’elezione, ovviamente. E dicemmo: ‘vogliamo far fare il referendum prima delle elezioni. (...) E Berlusconi ci disse: ‘ma noi così perdiamo anche le elezioni!’ ». Interview with Francesco D’Onofrio, op. cit.

each of the coalition members and to tempter internal conflicts within parties. These dynamics of deal expansion come at a cost, however: they make the final agreement very hard to read, very complex, and in all likelihood at odds with the initial objectives it aimed to promote. Fusaro pointed out the exact same conclusion when studying the attempted constitutional reform put together by the Third Bicameral Commission between 1997 and 1998 in Italy. He concludes: “when a project must be tuned to too many and conflicting interests, its quality is going to be poorer and poorer in direct proportion to the number of actors involved” (Fusaro 1998, 70). “Too many cooks spoil the broth”, as the saying goes: here, the very conditions enabling an agreement to be found also meant that any deal would necessarily contain contradictory incentives and lead to uncertain outcomes. Finally, the paper has illustrated the importance of time management, and to analyse reform as part of a full-blown sequence, in which the “position” of each negotiation in time is essential to understand the final outcome. As a consequence, and despite the fact that the parliamentary battle for the constitutional reforms had been won, the time required to finalise the deal prevented the centre-right coalition from holding a referendum in favourable conditions, leading to the failure of the constitutional reform. On the contrary, the fact that the discussion on the electoral reform occurred at the very end of the sequence has enabled the reform to be adopted *in extremis*, to avoid the “explosion” of the coalition and the failure of the deal on the constitution after three years of negotiation.

The case of Italy, although it is always presented as an outlier, is by no means a “different” case, although the coalition studied here was particularly fragmented and divided. On the contrary, it is arguable that the dynamics illustrated here are to be found in any coalition where a divisive issue is at stake. It shows us the importance of opening the Pandora box of coalition dynamics, and sets this question as an important agenda of research for the future.

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