

# **Which Democracies in Southern Europe?**

Leonardo MORLINO

Università di Firenze

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A few years ago (1988) Lijphart and other authors<sup>1</sup> examined similarities and differences between Southern European democracies (Portugal, Spain, Italy, and Greece), also in comparison with other democratic countries, in terms of majoritarian and consensual types of democracy (see also Lijphart, 1984). Their conclusion was that those countries did not form a distinctive and cohesive cluster: Portugal was consensual and unitary, Spain majoritarian and federal, Italy consensual and slightly decentralized, and Greece majoritarian and unitary. Furthermore, they stressed that «the changes that seem likely to occur in Spain, Portugal and Greece will all have the effect of reinforcing the majoritarianism of already majoritarian regimes...and, similarly, of reinforcing the consensualism of already consensual systems.... This means that....the four countries are much more likely to move farther away from each other than to draw together» (Lijphart et al. 1988, 22).

In this paper the institutional models and relative changes in the four countries will be reviewed in four different stages: first, a theoretical proposal to integrate the analysis of democratic regimes will be suggested; second, the four models which emerged from the process of consolidation will be sketched; third, the recent changes analyzed, with particular reference to Italy; fourth, the conclusion will show that, contrariwise to some expectations, the four countries are closer to each other in terms of the majoritarian trend, and this may be considered a distinctive one vis-à-vis other European countries, but not vis-à-vis other countries which have recently undergone processes of democratization. In particular, the countries which shifted toward a majoritarian solution were: Italy since 1993 and Portugal during the final moments of its consolidation, since 1987. Lastly, the key question is what kind of majoritarianism exists at present or is about to be implemented in those democracies.

## **WHICH DEMOCRACIES? A THEORETICAL PROPOSAL**

Here, the problem is which democracies were actually instaurated and consolidated in Southern Europe. And such a question becomes particularly relevant when there is not only the transition from an authoritarian regime to a democratic one, but also from one kind of democracy to a different type of democratic regime -a phenomenon that recurs more frequently with the diffusion of democracy in different areas of the world. Thus, in order to reply to the question on «which democracy», it is possible to suggest immediately what the basic theoretical features and the main empirical models of democracy are. Here, a systematic analysis of all types of democracy is neither possible nor

necessary<sup>2</sup>. It will be enough to consider the most relevant models for the empirical cases analyzed here.

During last decade, important research and essays have been produced on the institutional aspects of democracy (Powell 1982; Lijphart, 1984 and 1992; Linz and Valenzuela, 1994; Sartori, 1994; and others). One lesson suggested by these contributions is that electoral rules<sup>3</sup> and rules of government have to be seen as a whole and they shape a «system» with its own characteristics. In this perspective, by taking for granted various observations of these authors and by simplifying them for our own aims, the two main features (electoral system and relationships between cabinet and assembly) stemming from this literature may be classified and combined as follows:

- a1. Presidential institutions and majoritarian electoral system;
- a2. Semi-presidentialism and majoritarian electoral system;
- a3. Semi-parliamentarianism and reinforced proportional or majoritarian system<sup>4</sup>;
- a4. Parliamentarianism and proportional system (PR);
- a5. Presidentialism and proportional system (PR).

In semi-presidentialism, a notion developed by Duverger (1980), the head of state is elected by general population and the prime minister must maintain the confidence of the Parliament. This diarchical arrangement has the consequence that the power of the President is weakened or nullified by an opposing, strong and cohesive majority in parliament<sup>5</sup>. Semi-parliamentarianism is a chancellor democracy where the prime minister and his or her cabinet play a much stronger role vis-à-vis Parliament. The best known example of the first case is the Fifth French Republic, whereas the United Kingdom is the commonly-quoted example of the second case. The specific institutional arrangement where presidentialism and PR for the election of parliament are together, that is the most recurring institutional solution adopted in Latin America (see Jones 1995), may also be pointed out.

There is a third characteristic which is particularly relevant, also in our cases, and helps to define the institutional model better, stricto sensu. This is the extent of decentralization in the allocation of powers from the central government to the peripheral ones. The main classic variables which need to be taken into account are: the equal representation of the local units of different size at a central level through a specific Chamber; the autonomy of local units in several domains; and the fiscal autonomy of local governments. Forms and modes of decentralization may be found in each of the four types sketched above.

The second set of features which define a democracy is given by the party system. Some authors clearly state the historical and logical connection between political parties and democracy (see, recently, Pomper 1992) or even define democracy in terms of parties (see, also recently, Sartori 1993, 41). As intermediate institutions, which are at the same time vote-seeking, office-seeking and policy-seeking<sup>6</sup>, parties (and the party system) can be seen in a variety of moments and functions. For instance, in their efforts to achieve (electoral) consensus and support at a mass level; or when they fill governmental and parliamentary posts, or accept office in local government; or when they formulate policies which are supported by themselves as incumbent parties and resisted by the parties in opposition; but also in their relationships with the bureaucracy, the military, and the judiciary, still at an élite level<sup>7</sup>.

The number and relative size of parties, their specific organizational aspects<sup>8</sup>, the composition and homogeneity or heterogeneity<sup>9</sup> of the party coalition supporting the cabinet are the main features which define the party system in a democracy. On this ground, a simplified typology may be suggested:

- b1. Cohesive dominant party system & one-party cabinet;
- b2. Dominant party with a strong leader, one party cabinet;
- b3. Twopartism & one-party cabinet;
- b4. Homogeneous multipartism & coalition cabinet;
- b5. Heterogeneous multipartism & coalition cabinet<sup>10</sup>.

It is only obvious that behind each case there are different forms and extents of competition, influenced by the different institutional rules with regard to the threshold of access to the political arena, especially the electoral one; the difference between the main parties in terms of votes and seats; the size of electoral volatility in the party systems for different reasons; some characteristics of electoral law or parliamentary decision-making process<sup>11</sup>.

There is, however, another set of factors which are very relevant for a better understanding of what is a democratic regime. In spite of the fact that these features are not usually considered when a typological analysis of democracy is proposed, our cases suggested their salience. In fact, on the one hand, they grasp some substantial elements of democratic regimes with social and economic implications; on the other hand, they connect the typological analysis with those processes of change we would like to analyze because they are characterizing elements of installation, consolidation and crisis (see below)<sup>12</sup>.

For want of a better word and with reference to the large literature on the topic, these aspects are called autonomy of the civil society in its articulation -that is, mainly, economic (mainly business), intellectual and media élites, as well as associations of interests and other kinds of associations- toward the state institutions or the party élites and parties or, in the opposite perspective, the control of civil society by political institutions and party élites<sup>13</sup>. Here, two more precise features of this aspect may be taken into account: the role of party élites and parties vis-à-vis business élites, unions and other organized interest groups in policy making; the extent to which active non-organized élites exist, such as large or small, but diffuse private business, and of a network of associations of different kinds, such as unions, intellectuals, religious associations, and so on.

A way of looking at relationships and links between parties and economic élites, unions and other economic associations is to see whether parties, and the party system as a whole, are able to perform a «gatekeeping» role towards the groups, that is the role performed by the incumbent and non-incumbent party (or party system) in controlling the access of interest groups and élites to the decisional arena. Consequently, for interest associations and other élites, party intermediation is the best way to protect their interests<sup>14</sup>.

We can sketch at least three possible scenarios for the relationships between parties and groups, with or without a direct role for the public sector. The first, dominance or, in a stronger form, occupation, envisages a situation in which the party system largely dominates civil society in general, and interest groups in particular. The groups are mainly ancillary organizations for the parties, which have very solid autonomous sources of power in terms of ideology and internal organization. This is so for unions and other associations, but also weak business élites are subordinate to parties.

The second, neutrality, foresees no definite links between groups and parties. Interest groups are more or less organized and politically active, with their own economic and social bases. Similarly, parties have their autonomous power bases, and also control the decision-making process, according to the rules the democratic regime grants to party élites. Basically, parties perform a gatekeeping role: groups and people are compelled to appeal to parties and party leaders to promote and protect their interests. But no special strong relationship is established between a group and a particular party. That is, business groups are in a more independent position vis-à-vis parties and, in spite of their stable links with parties, unions also have their own domains.

In the third possibility, direct access, parties (and party élites) are bypassed in the actual performance of the representation process. Interest groups and business élites outbid parties because of personal relationships with parliamentary members, ministries and the bureaucracy, or in other ways. Parties have weak autonomous bases and sources of power and they are not able to achieve stronger ones. No gatekeeping role is performed<sup>15</sup>.

There are obvious connections between this aspect, which I have just sketched out, and that other element: the existence of different sorts of autonomous, non-political élites and a network of associations, interest groups included. In fact, this aspect is the other side of the same coin. It is not particularly difficult to check empirically the existence of a civil society, with active and participating citizens, where it is possible to see different kinds of élites, an independent press and TV networks, a rich network of associations, more or less highly organized, in other words a high degree of associability, though possibly without direct political goals, but with its own resources. If so, the relationships between party élites and civil society will be one of neutrality or also direct access. On the contrary, if the civil society is poorly organized and without autonomous resources, then the dominant solution is very probable.

Furthermore, here, the most interesting aspects concern the factors that may account for party control of society or, vice versa, its autonomy. In fact, in this explanation it is possible to check the connections among the three sets of factors we have indicated. If we take for granted the crucial aspects relating to economic and social pluralism and its development, the other political and social factors which should be taken into account for an understanding of institutional control of civil society include the following:

1. at the state level, the size of the public sector of the economy or of state intervention in economic affairs and the limitation of market; with the consequent possibility that all positions in that sector may be filled by party appointments and that party élites may -and, actually, do- develop particularistic special relationships through the allocation of economic resources<sup>16</sup>;

2. at the regime level, the rules that contribute to the role of parties vis-à-vis groups and élites, such as the centralization of the decision-making process and the consequent governmental control;

3. at the party system level, a specific system such as the predominant one;

4. at the party level, a few internal characteristics that help to strengthen the role of parties, such as a strong internal party cohesion, maybe with a developed organization or a strong leader;

5. at the socio-cultural level, the diffusion of strong ideologies that give parties a prominent position in the public debate;

On the contrary, in the respective domains a limited public sector, a decentralized process of decision-making where there is plenty of room for interest representation at the parliamentary level, a heterogeneous multiparty system, a high fragmentation within parties and undeveloped organizational structures and, finally, a strong deideologization, result in a highly autonomous civil society.

Thus, by putting together all these factors, two opposite results will emerge: control in case of party dominance, a large public sector, limited space for private interests and a dependent, insufficiently articulated, civil society; autonomy in the opposite case of party neutrality or direct access, a vital and complex civil society and almost no public economic sector. There are, however, two very likely intermediate possibilities where the role of political élites prevails and influences the civil society, which is partly dependent on them, or where neutrality or direct access is complemented by a relatively autonomous society with a fairly important public sector.

The whole picture is shown in Figure 1 where all the main variables are listed. In terms of democratic models, the combination of the three sets of variables might give several different democracies. However, here it is more relevant to point to a few majoritarian models. In fact, in the geopolitical area in which we are mostly interested these appear the most recurrent ones. Thus, first, there is the majoritarian democracy or, in the words of Lijphart (1984), the «Westminster model», that is the result of the combination of semi-parliamentarism & reinforced PR or majoritarian system, bipartism & one-party cabinet and autonomy; but a majoritarian model might also be the result of the combination of presidential institutions & majoritarian electoral system, bipartism & one-party cabinet, and autonomy. In addition, there are the models which might prove to be more relevant here: plebiscitary democracy and strongly majoritarian democracy. The former is the result of presidential institutions and majoritarian

electoral system, dominant party, strong leader, one-party cabinet, and control, or even semi-control, and it is very common in Latin America as well<sup>17</sup>. The latter model is the combination of presidential institutions and majoritarian electoral system or semi-presidentialism & majoritarian electoral system, cohesive dominant party & one-party cabinet or homogeneous multipartism & coalition cabinet, and control. Of course, there is the possibility of weak majoritarian democracy: parliamentarianism and PR system, cohesive dominant party & one-party cabinet or dominant party, strong leader, one-party cabinet, and semi-autonomy or semi-control; proportional democracy: parliamentarianism and PR system, homogeneous multipartism & coalition cabinet, and autonomy, or semi-autonomy; or conflictual democracy: parliamentarianism and PR system, heterogeneous multipartism & coalition cabinet, control or semi-control. A more detailed analysis of the cases will empirically show how the implementation of these models works. Here, summarily Figure 2 presents the various models<sup>18</sup>.

## **PATTERNS OF DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION**

Which democracies emerge out of the process of consolidation in the four countries?<sup>19</sup> By looking at institutional features, stricto sensu, through gradual adaptation and change, Portugal, Spain and Greece have become semi-parliamentarian regimes or «chancellor» democracies, that is parliamentary regimes where the role of prime minister and cabinet prevails vis-à-vis the assembly. In this perspective, all three regimes are majoritarian. But the process of adaptation is particularly relevant in Greece and Portugal. In Greece with the passing of the time, but especially after 1985, the role of prime minister has become more important than that of the head of the state, elected by parliament. The ambiguities of the constitution in defining the roles of the prime minister and the head of the state are bypassed by the one-party cabinets, also by means of a reinforced PR. In Portugal, particularly after the constitutional revision of 1982, the neutralization of the army after 1986 and, above all, the establishment of a predominant party system after 1987, the adaptation also opens the way to a chancellor democracy that is not modified by the direct election of the head of the state and a relatively proportional electoral system.

In Italy, the electoral law was highly proportional and consequently 'neutral' vis-à-vis the parties: it simply mirrored the cleavages and conflicts existing in civil society and granted a parliamentary representation to every relevant political force. At the moment of consolidation, that is during the late 1940s and early 1950s, a different choice would have implied the further radicalization and the

probable crisis and disruption of the regime. The same appropriateness characterizes the process of decision-making at the center, which also aimed at being 'neutral', in the same way as the electoral laws. Namely, both the rules of decision-making and the established routines gave Parliament the possibility of strongly influencing the cabinet<sup>20</sup>. In addition, there were both the special role of several standing Committees in the real working of Parliament, and the existence of two Chambers almost perfectly symmetrical and congruent<sup>21</sup>. Thus, in Italy a highly parliamentary regime is established and consolidated, but it is interesting to stress that the predominant role of Christian Democracy means that this regime worked as a semi-parliamentarian one or as a chancellor democracy at least up to 1953. Thus, both Portugal and Italy show the preeminence of the party factor on the constitutional rules<sup>22</sup>.

When the party system is analyzed, the process of its adaptation and adjustment to civil society during the consolidation is clearly visible. First of all, the stabilization of the party system, in terms of electoral behavior and patterns of competition, in Italy and Greece is evident; Portugal being a «latecomer» in this; while Spain is a case in which there was a stabilization of the party system, but not of the parties themselves, after 1982.

In this perspective, one element vividly emerges: the party system which is stabilized is a predominant party system in two cases (Portugal and Spain), a predominant system in an initial phase (1948-53) and a party system with a pivotal party in a second period (Italy), and a quasi-twopartism (Greece). There is no chance, here, to explore and explain these party systems in detail. However, to put it briefly, the predominant party system and, in some cases, the pivotal party emerges from a problem of legitimacy. More precisely, the exclusion or the weakness of the right because of its involvement in the authoritarian past, and of the extreme left because of its refusal to espouse democratic institutions, led to the predominance of Christian Democrats in Italy, Socialists in Spain and Social Democrats in Portugal. Greece proves this hypothesis a contrario. In fact, in this country the quasi-twopartism is the result of the fact that the right was never delegitimated and also was the main actor in the phase of installation and later, up to 1981<sup>23</sup>.

With regard to internal party organization, Italy stands out as a case in which ideology, initial mass mobilization and bipolarization, brought about a more developed party organization, thanks also to Catholic groups, authentic ancillary associations for Christian Democracy. In Spain the opposite is true. The combination of a long, traditional anti-party propaganda under Franco, the waning

of ideology, the modernization of a complex society were all strong obstacles to party organization. The development of mass media and other techniques in a modern society led party leaders to appreciate other party models and not to create the old organization based on cells and sections. As shown by my previous analysis (Morlino 1995), Greece and Portugal are in the middle, but closer to the Italian case than to Spain. After all, strong bipolarization and some ideological tenets contributed to the organizational development of PASOK and, later on, to the transformation and organizational development of Nea Demokratia during the second part of the 1980s. The same applies to the Portuguese Social Democrats in their competition with the Socialists.

Thus, on the whole, in Greece there are a quasi two-partism, one party cabinet and different instances of party alternation; in Italy, there are a heterogeneous multipartism<sup>24</sup> and coalition cabinets up to the late 1980s; in Spain, a predominant party system with a strong leader and one-party cabinets; and, finally, in Portugal, a cohesive predominant party system and one-party cabinet after 1987.

When the last aspect, autonomy versus control, is considered with specific reference to relationships between interests and parties, then the attempt of parties to strengthen their positions and, at the same time, to control civil society, also thanks to the state resources they can allocate, is evident. One hypothesis that can explain these phenomena is that after the democratic installation the logic of party competition entails, as a side effect, a mutual adjustment of parties as intermediary representative structures vis-à-vis civil society, and also an attempt at self-strengthening to obtain the firmer support of certain sectors of society, or to control them. This sub-process may even lead to the creation of a self-perpetuating internal system, in the case of limited legitimacy, and/or to an adaptation-rationalization of institutions and procedures in order to achieve higher decisional efficacy and effectiveness<sup>25</sup>. In fact, not only would higher efficacy and effectiveness allow parties to implement their policies better, but this result would strengthen them at an electoral level and in their relationships with interest groups. In other words, the actors seek to achieve their own bases of power and acquire a vested interest in maintaining themselves and increasing their power, once installed. They have to do so to compete with the other actors, mainly other parties. If, in addition, the parties are democratic in their beliefs and the competition is encapsulated in defined procedures, the final effect is the growth of consolidation.

On the whole, although to a different degree, in all four countries there is a partisan occupation of the state: the phenomenon is relatively smaller in the case of Spain, but greater in the three other countries. Thus, neutrality characterizes the relationships between parties and interests in Spain; party dominance is typical of Italy; in Greece, a more accentuated occupation during the PASOK decade is the rule; and Portugal is again in between Italy and Greece. The higher autonomy of civil society in Spain vis-à-vis all other three countries emerges clearly<sup>26</sup>.

On the grounds of this analysis it is possible to construct different patterns of consolidation. If party stabilization, the role of mass parties and of their organization, even through their ancillary associations, and on the whole partisan dominance are emphasized, then the Italian one is an organizational or party consolidation.

In Spain the process has developed in very different way. As I have said, there is no strong stabilization of the party system, and only a relative continuity of the political class, no structuring of parties, a gatekeeping role characterized by neutrality; but the Socialist party and its leader, Felipe González, occupy a key position in the party system and, at the same time, a widespread legitimacy was achieved in a few years, in spite of some limited anti-regime positions. Therefore, from the point of view of the main actors in the process, it is an élite consolidation.

In Greece and Portugal there are aspects more similar to the first model and others closer to the second one. In particular, in Greece there is a strong stabilization of the party system, characterized by continuity in voting behavior, stabilization of the political class, a fairly strong internal party organization and, at the same time, the occupation of civil society by the incumbent party and a great role played by the public sector, which lends additional strength to that occupation. Thus, if the main characteristics of the process are emphasized, the best definition seems state consolidation.

Finally in Portugal, the process seems to point to the stabilization of the party system after 1987; some stabilization of the political class; a relatively developed internal party organization; party dominance and a strong role played by the public sector until the end of the 1980s, when another reform of the Constitution (1989) paved the way to some development of private enterprise. Thus, if attention is paid to the actors of consolidation, we have another instance of state consolidation with an important role played by the old corporatist authoritarian tradition.

In all four cases, the three sets of factors (see Figure 1) are clearly related: even the third one to the other two. For example, in the actual working of the parliament in Italy, compensation was **de facto** offered for the marginalization of the interests linked to the forces on the Left. The groups, including the non-organized ones, associated with the parties on the Left, found a two-fold response: both symbolic and substantive. The visible action, which is typical of a parliamentary arena, was a factor of integration, but also allowed the parties to establish their image vis-à-vis the groups they represented and thus to maintain their electoral consensus. In the parliamentary Committees, the Left frequently voted with the government and the DC (cf. Morisi 1991). Moreover, as regards trade-union issues, Parliament became the main arena in which to seek solutions to trade-union demands. Parliament was thus vital not only for the interests represented and protected by the dominant party, Christian Democracy, and its minor partners, Liberals and Republicans, but also for the very survival of the organizations of the Left during this particularly difficult period.

Thus, which democracies are consolidated in the four countries? At the end of the 1950s and for more than two decades Italy is a conflictual democracy, weakly consolidated through the process described above, that also account for that result; the other three countries belong to the majoritarian genus: Portugal is probably closer the strongly majoritarian model as well as Greece; and Spain closer to weak majoritarianism.

## **THE CHANGE IN THE FOUR DEMOCRACIES. AN EXCURSUS ON ITALY**

During the post-consolidation years, in two countries (Portugal and Spain) there is persistence as well as the first consistent signs of potential change in some aspects. In a third country (Greece) some changes and a more definite characterization of the consolidated regime emerged. After the period of crisis in the mid 1970s, at the end of 1980s and early 1990s, Italy, our fourth country, entered a new phase of regime crisis and transition toward a new democracy.

In Spain the constitutional model, the party system and the relationships between parties and civil society remains basically stable: a minor growth in electoral volatility in 1993 (see Morlino 1995) is complemented by a perfectly stable inter-bloc volatility (see *ibidem.*), which stresses the unchanged relative salience of the left-right cleavage, and by a small decline in fractionalization and

the number of effective parties, from 2.9 in 1989 to 2.7 in 1993. The major changes are the growing capacity of regional parties in parliament to blackmail the government because the Socialists have lost seats (from 175 in 1989 to 159 in 1993) and the resounding victory of Partido Popular in the ineffective, but important European election of June 1994, compounded by the internal divisions among Socialists. In spite of all that, the dominant position of PSOE is maintained and the main characteristics of the consolidation process and democratic regime remain unchanged, as well. The perspectives, however, are open, and an alternation with the rightist Partido Popular is now a future possibility. The consequences of that would be paramount.

Portugal is also undergoing a period of unchanged persistence in terms of constitutional model and party system, but the state characteristics of its consolidation process are fading. In fact, since the end of 1980s the economic crisis became an intervening variable that accounted for any effort at improving the main economic determinants, partly by cutting government expenditure and consequently limiting the public deficit. Thus, particularly since 1989, this has led to implementing a policy of privatization in both the industrial and financial sectors. During these years, more than 28 enterprises have been privatized. In the same years the expenditure on the welfare system has grown at a different pace in the various sector, but here, too, there is an attempt to control and cut these expenditures (see OECD 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1993). Therefore, in Portuguese politics the role of the state is clearly declining, and this will unavoidably affect the characteristics of that democracy: no longer a regime dominated by state intervention in the economic sectors, but a democracy where civil society may achieve a different, and more active, position. Thus, the most recent electoral victory of Portuguese Socialists in early October 1995 may inaugurate a transition toward classic majoritarianism, but if so this is a process entirely to unfold.

In Greece, a much higher electoral volatility in 1993 (from 3.3 to 17.7) (see Morlino 1995) and the doubling of inter-bloc volatility (from 2.1 to 4.2) (see *ibidem*) are not mirrored by a change in the number of parties, either before the implementation of a new, more proportional, electoral rule (see *ibidem*), or after (see *ibidem*). But they point to the problem of party system: a split in Nea Demokratia<sup>27</sup> after deep disagreements over the foreign and domestic policies of the Mitsotakis cabinet and a division within the extreme left. As a result, Pasok returned to government after the election of October 1993. Thus, after 1989 alternation seems to become a key aspect of Greek democracy, an innovation vis-à-vis the previous decade of Pasok rule. In addition, as in Portugal, since

1991-1992 Mitsotakis' policies of deregulation, liberalization in many fields and also privatization of many firms in the industrial, financial and service sectors begin to change the basic state characteristics of Greek democracy, emerging from the process of consolidation (see OECD, 1990-91, 1991-92, 1993). However, a basic difference with Portugal is still in the mechanism of alternation: that is, while in Portugal a stable dominant leadership and a predominant party system make the serious and effective implementation of privatization policies possible, in Greece the change of the incumbent party, after the victory of Pasok in the elections of October 1993, will probably put a stop to those policies, and in some occasion, may reverse them.

In all three cases there is not a change in the form of democracy, but a growing instability of the same form in Spain, a important change in Portugal because of the possible activation and higher autonomy of civil society, and a similar trend in Greece. When we turn to Italy, things are very different. Almost half a century after the reestablishment of Italian democracy, its regime has entered into a phase of far-reaching change. A period of deeper crisis began in 1987 that led to substantial, though partial changes, the most radical of which relate to changes in the electoral laws, the party system and relationships with civil society.

The new electoral laws at municipal and national levels are both majoritarians. The enactment of a new municipal-level electoral law in March 1993 had an immediate polarizing impact on the local by-elections of June and November-December of that same year. The new law provided for the direct election of the mayor. In municipalities with fewer than 15,000 inhabitants, a plurality of votes was sufficient for election. In larger municipalities, if no candidate received a majority, a run-off election was held between the two candidates receiving the most votes in the first round. Mayoral elections are linked with those for municipal councils through rules designed to assure a supportive majority for the victorious mayoral candidate.

A new national-level electoral system was approved in August 1993. It first came into effect in the general elections for the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies in March 27-28, 1994. In stark contrast with the relatively pure proportional representation system used over the preceding four decades, the new law allocates three quarters of the seats in both houses on the basis of a plurality (single-member) electoral system. The remaining quarter of the seats are allocated on the basis of proportional representation to partly compensate those parties which did not receive representation in the first (plurality) segment<sup>28</sup>. In

addition to the majoritarian biases inherent in all single-member district systems, a 4 percent minimum nationwide vote is established by law as a prerequisite for receiving representation through the PR segment for the Chamber of Deputies; for the Senate, there is no legal threshold, but since the allocation of PR seats is calculated at a regional level, there is a **de facto** threshold to receive PR seats of about 10 percent of the votes cast<sup>29</sup>. The proportional-representation segment of the vote softens the impact of the plurality system somewhat, but it is far from sufficient to offset its strong majoritarian bias. This represents a radical change in the electoral system that has had a dramatic impact on the configuration of the Italian party system.

Even prior to the casting of ballots in the 1994 election, the Italian party system had undergone a radical transformation: most of the parties participating in that contest were either brand new or had undergone a major face-lift. The left was the first segment of the political continuum to undergo a profound transformation. In the case of the PCI, the process came to a head with the collapse of the Berlin Wall. A new party was created in February 1991 with a new name (the Democratic Party of the Left, PDS) and new symbols. A segment of the old PCI with more orthodox communist views created a splinter party, Rifondazione Comunista, roughly one-third of the size of the PDS. At the same time the extreme left-wing party, Democrazia Proletaria, which with many other names had been to the left of the old PCI for almost twenty years, disappeared.

The Christian Democratic party was also radically transformed. Following the replacement of its party secretary in 1993 and a long intra-party struggle, a new Partito Popolare Italiano (PPI) was born (January 1994). The DC's conversion was also preceded and accompanied by schisms -from both the left and the right: some leaders entered the rightist Alleanza Nazionale (ex MSI) (see below); others formed the Centro Cristiano Democratico and became part of center rightist electoral coalition, the Polo della Libertà; in the summer of 1993, others had already formed another group, led by a former DC politician, Antonio Segni; still others formed a fifth party and entered the leftist coalition, calling themselves Cristiano Sociali.

Similarly, the Liberal, Republican and Socialist parties have all suffered schisms and have disappeared, or segments of them have survived with different names and symbols by joining either the PDS-led Alleanza Progressista or the centrist coalition Patto per l'Italia, formed by the PPI and the Patto Segni or even the Polo della Libertà. The Social Democrats, after changing their party secretary

several times, became such a small group that they were virtually eliminated by the majoritarian biases in the new electoral law.

As for the right, partly as a result of its strong performance in the local and partial elections in 1993, the MSI seized the political initiative and forged an Alleanza Nazionale (AN), along with the above mentioned tiny group from the former DC. AN, led by the secretary of MSI (Gianfranco Fini), maintained and even softened its rightist conservative positions. Except for some small extremist groups, the secretary was very careful to convey a clearly defined democratic image. This was also done via the recruitment of conservative democratic intellectuals.

In January 1994 a brand new party, Forza Italia, suddenly emerged under the leadership of the television magnate Silvio Berlusconi. Within only a few weeks of its birth, public opinion polls indicated that it would become the largest party in the new parliament. The startling surge of Forza Italia in public opinion surveys was the product of a political vacuum at the center and center-right, combined with the massive use of television propaganda. This is a key point which deserves to be stressed: several commentators have emphasized how the ownership and control of three television channels and the virtual control of several other local networks gave to Berlusconi's party an enormous asset during the electoral campaign. In addition, he was able to exploit such an asset at its best by profiting of some loopholes existing in the law for electoral propaganda. A careful, conscious use of opinion polls also suggested to him how empty and open was the political space in the center/center-right after the delegitimation, splits and disappearance of the old Christian Democracy and the deep crisis and split in the Socialist party. Thus, first, his prospects of success were grounded on the combination of the supply of a «new product» by an entrepreneur with high expertise in advertising and a demand for «new products» emerging from civil society<sup>30</sup>.

In the phenomenon of Forza Italia, the key role was performed by Berlusconi in another aspect, too. With his previous experience of firm links with the old political élites, and particularly with the former socialist leader Bettino Craxi, Berlusconi is the entrepreneur for whom it would be impossible to cope with a situation of high uncertainty and possible electoral victory of the «hated Communists» without intervening directly in politics; that is, it would be unthinkable for him to maintain an attitude of neutrality. Along with other small and middle entrepreneurs, who supported Forza Italia, for Berlusconi the moment of transition and change «necessarily» became a moment for entering politics

and trying to influence it by creating his own party. The association of entrepreneurs, however, did not openly show their partisan views and maintained an official position of neutrality. The support for him became more manifest at rank and file level, above all, in the post-electoral meetings of the association.

In terms of party organization<sup>31</sup>, the PDS and Rifondazione managed to preserve the structures of the former PCI, especially in Emilia Romagna, Tuscany, and Umbria. The PCI's heritage of offices and militants did not disappear, even though the PDS had decided (even prior to 1991) to reduce the number of party officials and rely on a leaner organization. It should be noted that all traditional parties implemented similar policies of sacking party functionaries and reducing the size of their party organization, given their respective financial difficulties. As a result, in July 1993 parliament passed a law that allowed party functionaries to be pensioned off early.

In contrast with the «light» party structure of the democratic left, the League developed a strong organization manned by voluntary workers (many of them young) from diverse social backgrounds. It emerged as a markedly hierarchical party with a strong leader and a central office controlling finances, electoral campaigns and party policy. As much as possible -and even with reference to its patterns of recruitment- the party organization is managed with the efficiency criteria that is typical of a private business.

The plans for creating Forza Italia were carefully laid during the second half of 1993. The party was launched and its organization openly built up in late January-March 1994, before and also during the electoral campaign for the March elections. The key organizational role was performed by the staff of Publitalia, a company which is part of Fininvest (the conglomerate owned by Berlusconi) and which is a leading firm in the advertising at a national level. In few days they were able to set up about 13.000 clubs all over Italy. Again, in an organizational sense, if the League is a party-firm, Forza Italia is a firm which also performs the role of party, at least during the electoral campaign, that is a firm-party. Today, it is trying to establish itself by maintaining its previous set of structures in an ancillary position, together with the parliamentary party, its governmental position, and a strong, undisputed leader.

The new Partito Popolare, despite its direct line of descent from Christian Democracy, can no longer depend on the political unity of the Catholic vote, since this has been divided among five main groups of the left, center, and right (see

above). Nonetheless, despite the substantial process of secularization that had taken place in Italy over the preceding 25 years and a more limited possibility of influence, the PPI could rely on support from the sectors of the Church hierarchy, the Catholic associations (AC), another Catholic group named *Comunione e Liberazione* (CL), and some sectors of the Catholic worker association (ACLI) (see Cartocci 1993, 119-152).

After the election of 1994, the transformation of the Italian party system is clearly visible: the party fractionalization, calculated on the basis of votes cast in the proportional lists, is close to that of 1992, but much higher than earlier; the number of effective parties, calculated on the basis of the various seats allocated, point to a strong territorialization of the vote in the single-member districts. It is well-known that in case of such a territorialization, plurality has a fragmenting impact on the party system. But the two measures that synthetically give the idea of the change are the TEV and the I-BV: in order to find similar figures one has to go back to the post-war years, almost half a century ago. We should stress how the change of system took place in two phases: in the period 1990-92 the left changed, in the following two years the same took place in the center-right. On the whole, as shown by volatility (TEV), during the last four years the whole party system was reshaped, and the high I-BV (Table 1) in 1992 and 1994 stressed how the change had also affected the basic left-right alignment.

The radical transformation of party system in the 1992-94 period, may be seen clearly and in greater detail if a simple comparison of electoral results in 1992 and 1994 is made. Such a comparison reveals how the major changes during these two years concern the center and the center-right: on the one hand, there is the breakdown of the main pillar of the «first republic», that is of Christian Democracy. This party moved from a pivotal, dominant position in the 1970s to a plurality position (around 30%), to the present 11% of the Partito Popolare, if the proportional segment is considered, but in the actual fact, 5% of total seats. On the other hand, there is the formation of Forza Italia and the notable growth of MSI-Alleanza Nazionale.

Thus, in 1994 the party system is formed by four parties which have polled between 15 and 20% and some smaller but decisive groups. Three of the four parties belong to the so-called Polo della Libertà (formed by Alleanza Nazionale, Lega Nord, Forza Italia, Centro Cristiano Democratico), which won 360 seats (57,1%), whereas the Progressisti (Rifondazione, PDS, Verdi, Rete, PSI, AD, Cristiano Sociali) won 213 seats (33,8%). The territorialization of the vote is particularly evident for the League that received 8.4% of proportional vote, but

gained 111 seats (23,4%) in the single member districts, all of them in the Northern regions of the country.

With reference to the third set of factors, control vs. autonomy of civil society, the changes in this domain are older: one should go back to the early 1980s, or even earlier, when the growth of economy, the deideologization and secularization of civil society, and the integration and change -even, of the name- of the Communist Party became evident phenomena. Thus, business entrepreneurs, struggling with the effects of widespread economic crisis made worse by huge public sector deficits, began to resist the demands of parties for money: no longer was there the need to support the governmental party in financial terms against the Communist «peril», while resources from the public sector for entrepreneurs were substantially diminished. Since Italian society had lost its religious connotations, Catholics no longer felt the need to rally in support of one powerful party. On the contrary, there was an «availability» to accept other political actors, as shown by the support given by some Catholic hierarchies to Forza Italia.

Agricultural interests are now mostly subject to European Community policies, rather than to domestic policies. Coldiretti, and to a lesser degree Confagricoltura, may still be reservoirs of votes, but in the early 1990s their members came to depend less and less on the DC. The point of no return for Coldiretti was January 1994, when its leaders announced a break with the DC. The interests of industrial entrepreneurs had evolved to such an extent that they (especially large firms, such as FIAT) denounced to the judiciary the system of corruption which had led to Tangentopoli (kick-back city). As I have said above, fear of terrorism and anxiety over the threat posed by Communism had disappeared, while at the same time the stresses of the economic crisis made it increasingly painful to pay kick-backs to parties, especially for firms facing the specter of bankruptcy. In this context, the small firms of Lombardy and the Veneto abandoned their former allegiance to the traditional parties (especially the DC), and began to shift their support: some to the League, for its local policies, its anti-centralism and its anti-government protests; others, more recently, to Forza Italia and Berlusconi. The ties linking trade unions to parties have also become much looser, and have undergone a significant transformation: the trade union agenda is now fully dominated by labor-related issues and demands. The idea of a unitary trade union without party ties has also gathered much strength.

On the whole, party domination over interests, whether organized or not, slowly diminished during the second half of the 1980s. In the end, the once

dominant traditional parties themselves disappeared. At the same time, the previously large public sector was also fading away: the process of privatization was launched by Ciampi's cabinet with the sale of the main public banks (Credito Italiano and Banca Commerciale) and it continued with that of the main Insurance Company (INA) and will be followed by several other devolutions. As in other European countries, the urgency of reducing the public debt and the economic crisis brought about such a economic policy. But from our point of view the important, persistent side effect is to have destroyed one of the main pillars of the previous model of consolidation.

Thus, in Italy there was a long phase of protracted crisis and slow, gradual de-consolidation; there were also moments when the process had turning points and a new reconsolidation seemed to take place; for example, during the Craxi cabinet in 1983-87. Then, the interweaving of all factors described above brought about a deeper, more manifest crisis and change. Such a change represents a marked departure from the party-society linkages within neutral institutions, which had served to underpin Italy's process of democratic consolidation. They are going to culminate in the establishment of a different democratic regime, where also the relations between the executive and the legislature are likely to be modified, maybe also with the direct election of the head of government, as some political forces are demanding. In other words, they might culminate in a majoritarian democracy which would be very different from the previous regime, even from an institutional perspective.

## **TOWARD WHICH MAJORITARIAN MODEL?**

With a clarification of the direction that consolidation is taking in Portugal and its transition to a different democratic regime, the common trend toward majoritarianism is very clear. In this perspective there is a convergence among the four countries, the explanation of which is also evident if we take a look at their internal political debates. The growing legitimation of democratic institutions by intermediary actors, such as parties and groups, makes possible the shifting toward the goal of efficacy and effectiveness, rather than that of representation and participation. But if this is so, the question becomes: what kind of majoritarianism is actually going to be implemented? Something closer the British Westminster model, that suggested by the USA, or the German «Kanzler democratie»? This is clearly an empirical question with strong normative implications.

Again to reply to such a question, two features have to be recalled. On the one hand, there is another common trend in the four countries, which is very clear in Spain, fairly evident in Italy, emerging in Greece, but still rather dormant in Portugal. This is the direction toward a shifting of power and initiative from the centre and central actors to the periphery and local élites (in both parties and groups). A mix of domestic factors and foreign ones account for such a trend, starting from the new potential role of regions in the European Community after the Maastricht Treaty. In any case if this trend is confirmed and will be institutionalized, countervailing forces which will limit the strength of a majoritarian solution will be created within the same institutions.

On the other hand, to understand better what kind of majoritarian democracies we may have in these countries, the analysis of the third set of variables mentioned above (Figure 1) is still essential. That is, the presence of an autonomous civil society, more or less structured, but independent from the political institutions and parties, is a key difference in establishing and maintaining a classic 'majoritarian democracy' or a 'strong majoritarianism', maybe still with plebiscitary characteristics (see Figure 2).

Even more specifically, one key aspect is particularly relevant: what will be the relationships between economic interests and politics? In the classic majoritarian model itself the institutional majoritarian rules and the existing party system counteract the strong economic and social pluralism of civil society. Namely, there is an autonomous civil society and, in a context of widespread legitimacy, the majoritarian regulations are necessary to a better governmental performance. Other, more consensual institutions would only bring about protracted ungovernability. Contrariwise, the majoritarian solution which may be implemented in our countries is one where the majoritarian rules reinforce and magnify in a paramount way the economic concentration and other socio-cultural elements which support the governmental coalition. In this way, a decisional efficacy may be achieved, but the side effect is again a solution of party dominance over civil society.

In this perspective, the common trend toward the shrinking of the public economic sectors, brought about by the economic crisis and the attempt to balance the budget, also has an additional effect, that is, to limit the power of political actors over civil society and at the same time to provide more space for its autonomization.

Again this problem seems particularly serious in Italy, where in this transitional phase the leader of one of the main party, Forza Italia, and also prime minister for a few months in 1994, is the owner of a large economic conglomerate with the main private TV networks and of several other diversified activities. His party also enjoys the support of small and middle enterprises, as well as of sectors of large private businesses. There is a risk that this situation will reproduce the previous model of political dominance, this time with the parties replaced by a small élite, but always with a limited space for pluralist demands and societal autonomy.

In this perspective, Italy may have taken a fairly common path toward a new consolidation characterized by the following steps: the introduction of some majoritarian rules and the choice of a large electorate bring about a contingent electoral majority; such a majority becomes a governmental majority; and, in the beginning, with the support of different economic interests, the new majority is able to impose a new control over civil society at large; thus, an odd democracy is implemented where a largely dominant coalition runs the country without much room for either societal autonomy or real, strong social and economic bases of opposition.

In Italy and in the other three countries, however, there are other important actors or factors of a political and societal sort which may make room for societal autonomy, and may stop and even revert the march toward a strong majoritarianism or a plebiscitary democracy. First, there is the important role that the parties in opposition may be called upon to play, such as Alianza Popular in Spain and the Socialists in Portugal up to the election of October 1995 and the Social democrats later on; Nea Demokratia in Greece and the Progressisti in Italy, but also regional parties, as the League in Italy with its territorial strongholds and its continual desire to distinguish and distance itself from Forza Italia and Alleanza Nazionale, on the one hand, and the Progressisti, on the other. Furthermore, in Italy if Bossi, the leader of the League, were able to gain parliamentary approval for a profound decentralization or a federal solution<sup>32</sup>, then the whole model would be twisted: the majoritarian rules would be counteracted by local powers, which would also be in the hands of opposition<sup>33</sup>. The same has already happened in Spain, particularly after the June 1993 elections.

Second, one should not forget all these institutions that, in the four countries, that may counterbalance the power of government, such as Constitutional Court, and so on. Again, with regard to Italy the whole judiciary is in

a very particular situation. Within a phase of protracted democratic crisis, the judiciary is becoming politicized in both an «objective» and «subjective» manner. De facto, it is performing the role of an institutional opposition to the government. Much as the depoliticization of the military was important as a task facing the consolidation of new democratic regimes in Portugal and certain Latin American countries, the depoliticization of the judiciary will be a meaningful issue for the new political (and social) majority.

Third, let us quickly mention the different bases of opposition which are present in society and will support its autonomy: from the independent press to the trade unions, or other associations, especially the Catholic ones.

To conclude, in all four countries it is possible to see a path toward the consolidation of strong majoritarian democratic regimes and this feature is a distinctive characteristic vis-à-vis the other Western European countries; but there are also counteracting forces and conditions which make the future of those democracies open to scenarios that could be partially different, but will probably remain within the majoritarian model. In the end the precise shape of these democratic regimes will depend on the choices of the different actors mentioned above.

***Table1***

<b>Table1</b>				
<b>Changes in the Italian Party System (1968-1994)*</b>				
	<b>TEV</b>	<b>I-BV</b>	<b>VF</b>	<b>EP</b>
<b>1968</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>.75</b>	<b>3.6</b>
<b>1972</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>.76</b>	<b>3.6</b>
<b>1976</b>	<b>8.2</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>.72</b>	<b>3.1</b>
<b>1979</b>	<b>5.3</b>	<b>.7</b>	<b>.74</b>	<b>3.4</b>
<b>1983</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>.3</b>	<b>.78</b>	<b>4.0</b>
<b>1987</b>	<b>8.4</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>.78</b>	<b>4.1</b>
<b>1992</b>	<b>16.2</b>	<b>5.2</b>	<b>.85</b>	<b>5.8</b>
<b>1994**</b>	<b>41.9</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>.87</b>	<b>7.3</b>

\* For the TEV (Total Electoral Volatility), I-BV (Inter-Bloc Volatility), VF (Vote Fractionalization), and EP (number of effective parties) in Italy during the previous years (since 1946)

\*\* With regards to I-BV, Socialdemocrats (PSDI), as in 1992, and Lista Pannella have been placed in the center-center/right block; the VF has been calculated on the basis of votes cast for the proportional segment; finally, if one considers the electoral coalitions (Pollo de la LibertàPatto per l'Italia, Alleanza Progressista in addition to Lista Pannella and other small local list) the EP is 3.6.

***Figure1***

<b>Figure 1</b>		
<b>Most Salient factors in Democracy: A Typological Proposal</b>		
<b>A. Governmental Institutions</b>	<b>B. Party System</b>	<b>C. Civil Society/Politics</b>
<b>a1. Presidentialism &amp; majoritarian electoral system</b>	<b>b1. Cohesive predominant party &amp; one-party cabinet</b>	<b>c1. Autonomy</b>
<b>a2. Semi-presidentialism &amp; majoritarian electoral system</b>	<b>b2. Predominant party, strong leader, one-party cabinet</b>	<b>c2. Semi-autonomy</b>
<b>a3. Semi-parliamentarism &amp; reinforced PR/majoritarian system</b>	<b>b3. Bipartism &amp; one-party cabinet</b>	<b>c3. Semi-control</b>
<b>a4. Parliamentarism &amp; PR</b>	<b>b4. Homogeneous multi-partism &amp; coalition cabinet</b>	<b>c4. Control</b>
<b>a5. Presidentialism &amp; PR</b>	<b>b5. Heterogeneous multi-partism &amp; coalition cabinet</b>	

Figure2

