

Exploring Autonomism: Asymmetry and New Developments in Italian Regionalism

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ABSTRACT This article proposes a theoretical framework for the study of the political and, above all, institutional dimensions of autonomism. In doing so, it points out the differences between autonomism and regionalism, the former being a variety of the latter, and between autonomism and federalism, with which autonomism shares some features. With this in view, the article offers a closer analysis of the forms and logics of the *de jure* asymmetry that characterises autonomism as an institutional arrangement. Autonomism is then used to interpret the historical evolution and recent development of Italian regionalism. The launch of *differentiated regionalism* in Italy constitutes an autonomist turning point, following the abandonment of federalism as a path towards institutional reform. Autonomism, unlike federalism, starts with the recognition of regional diversity, and is characterised by an open and very asymmetric distribution of power, as well as bilateral relations between individual regions and the State. The article concludes by reflecting on the innovative potential and critical aspects of an autonomist renewal of Italian regionalism.

KEYWORDS autonomism; regionalism; federalism; asymmetry; special autonomy; differentiated autonomy; Italy.

1. Introduction

For almost twenty years, *federalism* has been present on the Italian agenda for institutional reform as the way forward for the development of Italian regionalism; however, the debate and the path of reform have since changed direction once again. In the light of the emergence of what is termed *differentiated regionalism*, that is, an option provided for by Article 116 of the Italian Constitution currently taken up by the regions of Lombardy, Veneto

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and Emilia-Romagna, the direction now being taken is that of *autonomism* as a different design for institutional development. This article aims to reflect on autonomism, as it is widely experienced in Spain but also present in other European countries, first and foremost the UK, and which marked the beginnings of Italian regionalism with the establishment of the special-statute regions.¹

Autonomism, as a political phenomenon and, above all, as an institutional arrangement, is still bereft of solid theoretical foundations. It has not been studied to any great extent by political scientists, and in literature it tends to be considered as equivalent to regionalism, and at times confused with federalism, or indeed secessionism.² Without a doubt, there are similarities between these phenomena, and points where they overlap to some extent; however, there are also substantial differences among them. The aim of this article is to focus on these differences to define and explore autonomism from a theoretical viewpoint, in order to use it as an analytical category for understanding the forms and processes of state territorial restructuring. More specifically, with regard to the comparative literature, some characteristic features shall be identified permitting autonomism to be defined as a specific form of regionalism, while, at the same time, distinguishing it from federalism, without prejudice to the most obvious differences from secessionism.³ Autonomism will then be applied to the empirical study of Italian regionalism and its recent development.

The article is organised as follows: The first section defines autonomism in relation to the more general phenomenon of regionalism, the former being a variant of the latter. The second section analyses the similarities and differences between autonomism and federalism. The third section offers an in-depth examination of autonomism as an institutional arrangement, with

1. The principal institutional expressions of autonomism in Europe are: the autonomous Spanish communities; the five Italian special regions; and the British regions of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Furthermore, various island regions have been granted special autonomous status: the Åland Islands (Finland); the Azores and Madeira (Portugal); Greenland and the Faroe Islands (Denmark); and Corsica (France), albeit only partially as they do not possess full legislative power. See Benedikter, *The World's Modern Autonomy Systems*.

2. Álvarez Pereira, Portos and Vourdas, "Waving goodbye?"

3. Légaré and Suksi, "Rethinking the Forms of Autonomy"; Lluch, "Autonomism and Federalism".

specific reference to its characteristic *de jure* asymmetry. Section four provides a full overview of the history and development of Italian regionalism in the light of the theoretical framework set out, covering the autonomism of the special-statute regions, the crisis of the ordinary regions, the period of federalist reforms, and the most recent autonomist turn for ordinary regions. The concluding section examines some critical issues concerning the autonomist direction taken by Italian regionalism.

2. Autonomism and regionalism

Regionalism represents one of the most important transformations achieved by the unitary States from the second half of the 20TH century onwards. It consists of an innovative form of decentralisation leading to the creation of regions as *meso* governmental entities, that is, lying between the local level and the central level of government (Keating, 2013). Regionalism may take various forms, and involve diverse aspects of politics and administration, thus making it rather difficult to define in any straightforward manner. As has been pointed out, “regionalism is a notoriously imprecise term that has been used to describe everything from decentralization to the mobilization of sub-national identities”⁴ In order to understand regionalism, at least two meanings of this concept need to be distinguished:⁵ the first is regionalism as an institutional arrangement, that is, the outcome of a State’s regionalisation; the second is regionalism as a political ideology underlying the development of regionalist movements and parties.

There are basically three institutional forms of regionalism, and they differ from one another in the nature of the decentralised power:⁶ 1) functional regionalism (e.g. Greece) that establishes regions as agencies of central power, basically devoid of any autonomy other than the organizational one, required to perform few tasks, mainly related to local development; 2) administrative regionalism (e.g. France), whereby the regions are governed by elected bodies which, however, just like the more traditional local governments, although assigned a broad range of tasks, only enjoy administrative autonomy; 3) po-

4. Dahl Fitjar, *The Rise of Regionalism*, 2.

5. Caciagli, *Regioni d’Europa*; Keating, “The invention of regions”.

6. Bickerton and Gagnon, “Regions”.

litical regionalism (e.g. Italy), whereby the regions not only have their own elected bodies and enjoy administrative autonomy, but also exercise legislative power. As we will see, autonomism is an institutional variant of political regionalism.

However, regionalism is not only an institutional arrangement. It also represents a political ideology that first appeared during the French Revolution, and emerged in particular in the arguments of the Girondins who, inspired by the American federal experience, rejected the Jacobin idea of a centralised, uniformly organised State.⁷ The ideological dimension of regionalism, which was to be perfected during the Italian *Risorgimento*,⁸ looked towards federalism but without embracing it entirely. It aimed to reform the unitary State to grant forms of autonomy to territorial peripheries, thus respecting the historical diversity of France's provinces.

As a political ideology, regionalism was only fully accomplished in the 20th century, with the emergence of regional movements and parties in various European countries calling for autonomy for their respective regions.⁹ These political movements developed around historical centre-periphery cleavages, marking the considerable distance between a given region and the home State. More specifically, the demand for autonomy emerged in the presence of regional diversities of two kinds, often inter-linked:¹⁰ 1) an ethno-cultural diversity, feeding a regional identity different from that of the home State; 2) an economic diversity, or gap, resulting in disadvantages for the region either because of its backwardness and thus its marginalisation within the State, or because of its being ahead in terms of development and consequent wealth, perceived as not sufficiently safeguarded by central policies.

Autonomism embraces this political dimension of regionalism: the mobilisation of a region characterised by ethno-cultural and/or economic diversity, demanding its own autonomy, and striving, individually, to express, defend and govern said diversity within the State whose integrity it does not chal-

7. Malandrino, *Federalismo*.

8. Baldini, and Baldi, "Decentralisation in Italy".

9. Sweden, *Federalism and Regionalism*.

10. Keating, "Rethinking Territorial Autonomy".

lenge, unlike secessionism.¹¹ The term *autonomy*, which derives from the ancient Greek words *auto* and *nomos*, and means *make one's own rules*, in political science literature in fact indicates the power of self-government of a territorial entity which, however, is subject to the authority of a higher entity, the same that granted it the aforementioned power.¹² The concept of *autonomy*, with regard to autonomism, is thus defined as that power of self-rule which is first requested by, and then possibly granted to, a region within a State.

In political terms, autonomism generates not only movements but also parties, those defined, indeed, as *autonomist*. According to a consolidated classification,¹³ *autonomist* parties are one of four kinds of *non-state-wide parties* (the others being *protectionist*, *federalist* and *secessionist* parties). These are all parties whose territory of reference is a circumscribed region within the State, this region being the only one in which they stand for election, and the only one whose community and identity they represent. *Autonomist* parties, unlike *protectionist* parties,¹⁴ always demand self-government for their own regions. However, they do not go as far as demanding full sovereignty, as the *secessionist* parties do. Furthermore, unlike *federalist* parties, the *autonomists'* demands only regard the region they represent, and they do not push for reforms concerning the entire State.

Autonomism also possesses an institutional dimension relating to the granting of autonomy to mobilised regions within the State.¹⁵ In institutional terms, it exists as a variant of regionalism with four specific characteristics: *bottom-up* roots, *bilateral* negotiations, power of *self-rule*, and *asymmetry*.

Regionalism, considered as a general phenomenon linked to decentralisation, has developed along traditional top-down lines, that is, in relation to requirements identified by central government which, through national laws, regionalises the entire State, and grants the diverse regions the same powers,

11. Henders, *Territoriality, asymmetry, and autonomy*; Lluch, *Visions of Sovereignty*.

12. Benedikter, *The World's Modern Autonomy Systems*; Suksi "Sub-State Governance".

13. De Winter and Türsan, *Regionalist Parties*.

14. The protectionist parties focus their claims on the protection of the regional cultural identity, usually the specific regional language, demanding cultural rights (e.g. the bilingual status in their region) that do not question the existing state structure. See Dandoy, "Ethno-regionalist parties".

15. Lluch, "Autonomism and Federalism".

which are not always legislative as in the case of administrative or functional regionalism. With reference to political regionalism, the process usually originates in a constitutional provision that foresees which specific legislative competences are to be transferred to the regions (e.g. Italy). Autonomism, on the other hand, derives from bottom-up mobilisation, rests on the bilateral negotiation (between the region and the State, subsequently converted into law) of self-rule power, and produces an asymmetric distribution of power across the country:¹⁶ autonomous regions are set up only in some areas of the State (as in the UK) and/or possess different levels of autonomy (as in Spain).¹⁷

A closer examination of the negotiating and asymmetric nature of autonomism is required here. As mentioned, the concept of autonomy is of an intrinsically relational character, since it concerns what is granted by the higher authority on the basis of what the region asks for.¹⁸ There is thus margin for negotiation: the degree of autonomy depends on what a region demands, and what it manages to obtain, from the State at the end of a process in which the region mobilises and acts individually. Hence the asymmetry: not all regions mobilise; not all regions have territorial diversities they wish to claim; not all of them demand or manage to obtain the same powers.¹⁹ In this regard, the literature distinguishes between *de facto* asymmetry and *de jure* asymmetry: *de facto* asymmetry reflects diversities that exist among the regions of a State while *de jure* asymmetry recognises them formally in the law and in the written constitution of the State, thus providing different powers to the different regions.²⁰ In the institutional dimension therefore, only *de jure* asymmetry is relevant, insofar as it represents an answer to the *de facto* asymmetries present within the State.²¹

16. Suksi, "Sub-State Governance".

17. The reference is only to the first phase of development of the Spanish State of Autonomies when seven Autonomous Communities boasted a higher level of autonomy than the remaining ten. Today, as a result of various developments and related reforms of the regional statutes, the State of Autonomies is much more symmetric than it was at the beginning. See Baldi "Lo Stato delle Autonomie"; Fossas, "Asimetría y plurinacionalidad".

18. Keating, "Rethinking Territorial Autonomy".

19. Lluç, "Autonomism and Federalism".

20. Burgess, "The Paradox of Diversity".

21. Given that no State possesses a perfectly homogeneous territory, there are *de facto* asymmetries of different kinds and degrees. Not all of them are capable of producing *de jure* asymmetries through political mobilisation. See among others: McGarry "Asymmetry in Federations"; Palermo, Zwilling and Kössler, *Asymmetries in constitutional law*.

Autonomism and regionalism thus indicate very different institutional arrangements, although ones that overlap to a certain extent. Autonomism remains a variant of political regionalism since it gives rise to regions having legislative power. Nevertheless, its asymmetric features, bilateral negotiation and bottom-up mobilisation indicate crucial differences. In the case of political regionalism, the power of self-rule is decided from above and is extended in a uniform manner right across the State; in the case of autonomism, however, said power is negotiated starting from a bottom-up mobilisation, resulting in the asymmetric distribution of that power.

3. Autonomism and federalism

Autonomism needs to be distinguished not only from the more general phenomenon of regionalism, but also from federalism, with which it shares the territorial division of self-rule power on a bottom-up basis.²² This concerns not only the traditional associative form of federalism resulting in previously sovereign entities coming together to create a higher level of government (e.g. the USA), but also the devolutionary form that transforms a unitary State into a federal State (e.g. Belgium). Devolutionary federalism is mainly based on bottom-up dynamics, in that it is triggered by demands from those same territories that are to constitute the federation itself. However, the division of power takes a different form in federalism than it does in autonomism, thus enabling the two arrangements to be distinguished.

Federalism may be defined as a combination of self-rule and shared rule, which guarantees the integrity of both the territorial polities constituting the State and the state polity comprising such polities.²³ In fact, federalism is based on constitutional guarantees that aim to preserve a balance between the autonomy of each regional territory (self-rule) and the shared government resulting from the federal union of the diverse territories (shared rule), thus avoiding the territories' autonomy being damaged by federal government, and vice-versa. Federalism differs from autonomism in three institutional

22. Lluch, "Autonomism and Federalism". In the great heterogeneity of the federal experience, however, it should be noted that some federations did not have a purely bottom-up origin, essentially those which originated in non-democratic contexts. See Stepan "Federalism and Democracy".

23. Elazar, *Exploring Federalism*.

characteristics: a predisposition to symmetry, territorial representation, and the stability of the distribution of power.²⁴

Federalism is traditionally of a symmetrical nature insofar as it acknowledges the equality of the territories composing the federation, which freely choose to form a federation on equal terms through the federal pact (*foedus*).²⁵ Such symmetry characterises traditional federal States—those of an associative nature²⁶—whereas in the case of devolutionary federalism a number of limited asymmetries may arise as a result of the diverse degrees of mobilisation of those regions calling for the federal transformation of the State (as in Belgium’s case, for example). Furthermore, asymmetry is associated with plurinational federal States as a means for governing regionally concentrated national minorities.²⁷ Nevertheless, as a federal union of territories, federalism always involves the entire State, and not just selected regions as can be the case with autonomism, thus limiting its asymmetrical potential.

While autonomism aims at obtaining self-rule for the individual region pushing for such, federalism attempts to balance regional self-rule with the shared rule of the entire State: this requires institutional mechanisms of integration, the most important of which is territorial representation.²⁸ In federalism, regional territories are represented in the upper house of national parliament (the federal Senate), which enables them to participate in the central law-making, including the review of the Constitution, in such a way as to impede the approval of laws detrimental to those territories’ autonomy. The federal Senate also promotes horizontal integration among

24. Lluch, “Autonomism and Federalism”; Suksi, “Sub-State Governance”.

25. Elazar, *Exploring Federalism*; Guzina, “Federalism and Regional Autonomy”.

26. The only exception is represented by Canada in relation to the French-speaking province of Québec. However, this asymmetry is not provided for by the Canadian Constitution (except in regard to linguistic powers), but it has developed during the evolution of the federal system, given Québec’s recourse to the *opting out* clause. For details, see Watts, “Federalism and Diversity in Canada”.

27. Ghai, *Autonomy and Ethnicity*; Requejo, and Nagel, *Federalism beyond Federations*. In Europe, in addition to Belgium, which is characterised by asymmetries mostly limited to the country’s German-speaking community and to the Brussels region, there are two other cases of asymmetric federations, both of them plurinational and formed following the dissolution of major communist regimes: Bosnia-Herzegovina and (European) Russia. See Sahadžić, “Federal Theory”.

28. Elazar, *Exploring Federalism*.

the regional territories as it is the institutional arena for the settlement of different interests and possible territorial conflicts.²⁹ This does not happen in the case of autonomism, as the regions are not represented in the central law-making, and there is no territorial chamber where their diversities can be mediated. Autonomism, in fact, does not aim at the creation of common institutions, and prefers bilateral relations with the State permitting each region to negotiate and defend its own autonomy, regardless of what other regions do. Consequently, autonomism is more inclined to produce dynamics of competition and disunity among regions, whereas federalism tends to promote territorial integration and aims at preserving a balance within the State as a whole.³⁰

Finally, autonomism features not only a less guaranteed, but also a more open, indeterminate distribution of power. Since the levels of autonomy are negotiated and not based on a fixed, predetermined constitutional provision, they are variable depending on the bilateral agreements reached. In federalism, on the other hand, the distribution of power is stable, insofar as it is determined constitutionally; any variation in that distribution entails a process of constitutional review, in which the regions participate through the territorial chamber.³¹

4. Asymmetry in autonomism

As we have seen, *de jure* asymmetry represents the most characteristic institutional aspect of autonomism, making it very different from regionalism and to a large extent from federalism. However, asymmetry may take diverse forms and respond to different logics. Taking a comparative view, four different types may be identified:³² 1) asymmetry of competences; 2) asymmetry of relations with the State; 3) fiscal asymmetry; 4) asymmetry in nation status.

29. As noted in the literature, not all the federal upper chambers perform the same functions, and some are more territorial than others. Moreover, Canada is an exception as its senate does not allow for true territorial representation. However, in the case of Canada this function is carried out through intergovernmental relations (executive federalism) which have reached a very high degree of institutionalization. See, among others, Watts, *Comparing Federal Systems*.

30. Lluçh, "Autonomism and Federalism".

31. Lluçh, *Visions of Sovereignty*.

32. This is a re-working of the types identified by Watts in *Comparative Federal Systems*.

These types are then ascribable to the two logics that can justify regional asymmetry, as deduced from comparative experience and clearly indicated in the Italian Constitution (art. 116):³³ *specialty* and *differentiation*.

The first type of asymmetry (*competences*) is the most widespread and consolidated, since it is always present in autonomism. A region's level of autonomy, in fact, is expressed in the legislative competences acquired through bilateral negotiation. The Spanish case is important here, as it is the negotiated statute of autonomy that establishes the areas in which a given AC may exercise its self-rule power, regardless of what is granted to other regions.

The second type of asymmetry (*relations with the State*) is also constantly present, insofar as bilateral negotiations result in different relations between individual regions and the State, and this impacts the State's own competences. This form of asymmetry is more evident when the autonomous regions are established across limited portions of the State, which finds itself exercising full authority only over the remaining part of its own territory. The UK is a case in point, as the powers granted to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are exercised by state institutions in the territory of England.

The third variety of asymmetry (*fiscal asymmetry*), on the other hand, is less common as it is reserved for a select number of regions. This is true for the special-statute regions in Italy as we shall see in section four, but also for the Spanish regions of Basque Country and Navarre, which enjoy a special tax system called *foral*³⁴ whereby they receive all of the tax revenue generated by their territories.³⁵ Fiscal asymmetry exists in the case of the UK too, where Scotland enjoys a degree of fiscal autonomy that the other regions do not have.³⁶ The limited extent of fiscal asymmetry can be ascribed to two factors at least. First of all, it concerns a power—fiscal power—that central government is reluctant to decentralise, since it is essential to important

33. On this distinction within the Italian Constitution, which will be further analysed in section four, see, among others, Lanza, "Asimmetria, differenziazione e specialità regionale"; Palermo and Valdesalici, "Irreversibly Different".

34. As deriving from the *fueros*, the ancient special laws granting autonomy to the Basque territories. Such a system is based on fiscal agreements that are regularly renegotiated by the two Basque regions and the central government.

35. Bossacoma and Sanjaume-Calvet, "Asymmetry as a Device".

36. Dickson, "A Country Study of Constitutional Asymmetry".

state functions, such as the cover for financial requirements across the country or the control of public spending, also in compliance with the restrictions imposed by supranational organisations, primarily the European Union. Furthermore, fiscal asymmetry can create financial imbalances and compromise the principle of territorial solidarity between the wealthier and poorer regions, which is of vital importance to preserve the financial sustainability of the State.

Finally, there are very few examples of the last type of asymmetry (*nation status*) in Europe. This type of asymmetry is associated with the plurinational nature of the State, that is the presence of stateless nations within its borders,³⁷ and with the development of minority nationalisms claiming not only the territorial diversity of their respective regions, but also the national status of said regions: examples of this comprise the historical regions of Spain.³⁸ Should the State formally recognise the mobilised region's status as a separate *nation*, as in the cases of Greenland and the Faroe Islands (Denmark), this creates an asymmetry between such region and the others, which remain an expression of the state nation. This type of asymmetry, while having significant potential for the adjustment of national minorities,³⁹ remains uncommon and somewhat controversial, as shown by the case of Catalonia.⁴⁰ This is because it tends to accompany claims of independence movements that go beyond the bounds of autonomism, and because there is still an on-going debate about whether the granting of nation status is only of symbolic worth, or whether it calls for the assignment of greater powers to the region.⁴¹

As far as the asymmetry's underlying logics are concerned, despite the difficulty of drawing clear lines between the two concepts of *specialty* and *differentiation*, they each express a different degree of recognition of regional diversity. *Specialty* indicates a more marked diversity based on strong elements of identity rooted in the history of the region, and in particular

37. Dahl Fitjar, *The Rise of Regionalism*; Requejo and Caminal, *Federalism, Plurinationality and Democratic Constitutionalism*.

38. Fossas, "Asimetría y plurinacionalidad".

39. Requejo and Nagel, *Federalism beyond Federations*.

40. Sanjaume-Calvet, "Federalismo pluralismo nacional y autodeterminación".

41. Holesch, *What holds a multinational state together?*

in the existence of a deep cleavage with the rest of the State, as expressed by clear distinguishing signs such as: an own language, a different religion, some specific legal or cultural traditions, but also a condition of insularity, which is usually accompanied not only by geographical distance but also by economic backwardness and cultural diversity that prevent the island region from being fully integrated in the State.⁴² The granting of special autonomous status aims to permit the ethno-cultural minorities and/or island peoples to express and govern their own diversity, and consequently to mitigate tensions and possible conflicts within the State.⁴³ Addressing specialty may thus result in advanced forms of negotiated autonomy, and consequent asymmetry: in addition to a general power of self-rule, special legislative powers may be granted in those sectors associated with the expression of a distinctive identity (e.g. language, education, mass media), and a special tax regime may be established to reduce the intrusion of central government, sustain the local economy and facilitate the recognition of the region's special status, as in the cases of the Basque regions and Scotland. Should history justify it, specialty could result also in the formal recognition of the region as a separate nation, as has happened in the aforementioned case of the Danish islands (the Faroes and Greenland), and also in the case of the UK, whose plurinational nature is constitutionally expressed by its being a *union State*.⁴⁴

The logic of *differentiation*, on the other hand, aims to address the different territorial vocations present within the State, where a region demands greater autonomy because it considers itself capable of governing its territory, and related specificities, better than the central government. In line with the principle of (vertical) subsidiarity,⁴⁵ such region may provide greater democracy and better performance in those policy sectors which can benefit from the *meso* dimension of governmental action, also bearing in mind the *de facto* asymmetries that characterise it, i.e. the specific political and socio-economic context that varies across regions.⁴⁶ Therefore, unlike the case of specialty,

42. Henders, *Territoriality, asymmetry, and autonomy*.

43. Dahl Fitjar, *The Rise of Regionalism*; Ghai, *Autonomy and Ethnicity*.

44. Keating, "Rethinking Territorial Autonomy".

45. Rolla, "The Development of Asymmetric Regionalism".

46. Popelier and Sahadžić, "A Country Studies-Based Deliberation on Constitutional Asymmetry".

regional mobilisation is not concerned with claiming a separate identity, or resolving historical centre-periphery cleavages, but rather with expressing a specific territorial vocation, in order to improve government performance, bring policy-making closer to citizens, and ensure better development for the region. Consequently, the logic of *differentiation* does not limit asymmetry to those regions with a unique historical heritage, but is open to all regions, whereby each region may be granted differentiated autonomy, depending on its own political and territorial vocation. The case of Spain is quite interesting in this regard as the State of Autonomies was mainly developed according to such logic, gradually overcoming the original specialty of the historical regions.⁴⁷

Figure 1. The symmetry-asymmetry continuum

REGIONALISM		AUTONOMISM	
UNIFORMITY	DIFFERENTIATION	SPECIALTY	ASYMMETRY
SYMMETRY			
<i>Regions with the same powers, and equal relations with the State (fully regionalised)</i>		<i>Asymmetry of competences and in relations with the State. Open to all regions</i>	
		<i>Greater asymmetry: competences over questions of identity; special fiscal autonomy; nation status. For historical regions only</i>	

Source: own elaboration.

Given that *differentiation* and *specialty* address diverse degrees of regional diversity, they may be ranged along a continuum, from a minimum to a maximum degree of asymmetry (Figure 1). While regionalism tends to be characterised by uniformity and symmetry among regions that arise throughout the country, with the same powers, and that have an equal relationship with the State, autonomism is always characterised by asymmetry, whether it takes the form of *differentiated autonomy* or of *special autonomy*. Specialty potentially also includes asymmetries concerning competences over questions of identity, greater fiscal autonomy, and the possible recognition of a distinct nation status.

47. Caminal, “The Spanish ‘Estado de las Autonomías’”.

5. The evolution of Italian regionalism: between autonomism and federalism

5.1. The original asymmetry and the weakness of ordinary regions

In Italy, the idea of establishing a regional State, which appeared briefly during the *Risorgimento*,⁴⁸ animated the political debate following the First World War, when it was proposed as a possible solution to the existing Southern Question (economic backwardness of Italy's southern regions), but also as a means to meet the claims of a number of autonomist movements emerging throughout the country:⁴⁹ in the South Tyrol area, annexed to Italy in 1919, where a movement established itself with the aim of protecting the Austrian identity, and eventually resulted in the autonomist party *Südtiroler Volkspartei*; in the Valle d'Aosta region, where a movement took root, aimed at protecting the historical French-speaking minority, and subsequently led to the autonomist party *Union Valdôtaine*; in Sardinia, where back in 1921 the *Partito Sardo d'Azione* was set up, demanding for regional self-rule to protect the island's separate cultural identity and fragile economy. The onset of Fascism, however, put paid to any attempted recognition of regional autonomy. It was not until the fall of the Fascist regime at the end of the Second World War, when the democratic forces forming the Constituent Assembly (1946-47) were called upon to decide on the territorial form of the newly-constituted Italian Republic, that any further opportunity arose for the establishment of some kind of regional autonomy. During that post-war period, the country's autonomist parties and movements gained renewed vigour, and were joined by two new movements: in Sicily, the *Movimento Indipendentista Siciliano* demanded full self-rule for the region, in defence of its historical identity and its backward economy; and in the Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, autonomist movements emerged for the protection of the Friulian community and the safeguard of the Slavic minorities (with the later establishment of the autonomist party *Slovenska Skupnost*), also in relation to the disputed eastern border with Yugoslavia.

48. Baldini and Baldi, "Decentralization in Italy".

49. Caciagli, *Regioni d'Europa*; Della Porta, *La politica locale*.

These regional mobilisations contributed to the decision, incorporated in the 1948 Constitution, to create a regional State; and they also account for the asymmetric nature of that State. In addition to the fifteen regions governed by *ordinary* statute (ORs), a further five regions were envisaged as being governed by *special* statute (SRs), in those areas where autonomism had emerged. The SRs thus originated claiming their special historical conditions and identities through bottom-up movements, and negotiating, via political representatives, their level of autonomy, which was not established by the Constitution. The negotiated statutes resulted in partially different powers and were then approved by constitutional law. The ORs, on the other hand, were conceived as an expression of mere political decentralisation, designed to achieve two major national objectives: 1) to affirm democratic values following the previous authoritarian Fascist period, that is, guarantee greater pluralism through the establishment of a third level of local government (in addition to the Municipalities and the Provinces) led by elected bodies, this time possessing legislative powers; 2) to modernise the State in order to better meet the challenges of welfare policies, with regional regulation and planning with regard to a limited number of policy sectors. The ORs, understandably, were instituted in a top-down process designed to cover the entire state territory, with all of them possessing the same powers, namely those specifically indicated by the Italian Constitution.

This original asymmetry raised doubts about the ORs which, compared to the SRs, appeared to be of less importance. While the latter represented a response to regional mobilisations, and were needed in order to govern historical centre-periphery cleavages,⁵⁰ the ORs had no territorial grounds: devoid of historical roots and of political movements demanding their institution, they were soon perceived to be of questionable utility.⁵¹ This was to impact their subsequent development. Unlike the SRs, which were set up straight away, over the space of a few months following the approval of the Constitution,⁵² the ORs were only established and made operative thirty years later, during the 1970's. In addition to the rather flimsy reasons for their original design, it became necessary to ensure the stability of national politics to prevent the

50. Ferrara *et al.*, "The Special Regions".

51. Cappuccio, "Le Regioni italiane"; Malandrino, *Federalismo*.

52. With the exception of Friuli Venezia Giulia, whose statute was approved in 1963 when the border with Yugoslavia was finally delimited.

Italian Communist Party—which during that historical cold war phase was perceived as an *anti-system* party—from governing important areas of the country, namely those *red* regions of Central Italy where it was deeply rooted and enjoyed widespread support. It was not until the *conventio ad excludendum* of national politics was loosened, on the one hand, and certain welfare policies were called for in order to guarantee homogeneous progress throughout the State⁵³ on the other hand, that the ORs were actually established.⁵⁴

The development of the ORs, however, never fulfilled its true potential, and as a result the gap with the SRs grew. The legislative power of ORs, which was already more limited, was gradually eroded by invasive state legislation covering areas of regional competence in the name of protecting national interests. The constitutional principle of financial autonomy was not implemented, and a system of derivative financing was organised based on state transfers and marked by centralisation and uniformity. In the early 1990s, prior to the reforms, 80% of the revenue of the ORs was composed of binding transfers from central government, thus depriving these regions not only of their own financial resources, but also of unconstrained spending. The SRs, on the other hand, enjoyed a special fiscal autonomy from the very start, which guaranteed them a great amount of the tax revenue generated by their territories, which they were free to use in order to finance policies and services for their citizens.⁵⁵

All of this contributed to the crisis of the ORs, which was to manifest itself just one decade after their creation. Established after enormous delay and without any autonomist purpose, they did not achieve any real degree of self-rule, being forced to operate in those narrow spaces left by central policies.⁵⁶ They remained an appendage of national politics, not giving rise to their own political parties, and they did not perform well in administrative terms: with a few virtuous exceptions in Northern Italy, they were not able to improve the efficiency of local services. Such weakness bordering on failure, quickly called for reforms to be made.

53. In particular healthcare policies, given the establishment, in 1978, of the Italian National Health Service, which required the ORs in order to plan hospitals and healthcare services.

54. Baldini and Baldi, “Decentralization in Italy”.

55. Palermo and Valdesalici, “Irreversibly Different”.

56. Baldini and Baldi, “Decentralization in Italy”.

5.2. Unfulfilled federal reforms

During the course of the 1990s, following the collapse of the so-called *First Republic*,⁵⁷ the Northern League (NL) party was founded and quickly achieved popularity:⁵⁸ this *non-state-wide-party*, which took up the cause of a number of wealthy but economically frustrated northern regions, focused its attention on the crisis of regionalism, and brought to the political debate the idea of a federal transformation of the country, which became increasingly popular among political parties and civil society at that time. Federalism became the flag flown by a cross-party movement demanding political and institutional renewal, starting with the granting of greater autonomy to regions, in order to guarantee a government more in line with the needs of citizens tired of political corruption, improve the local services provided, and, above all, better govern the wide socio-economic divide between Italy's North and South. It was this very divide, which had been mediated up until then by the Christian Democrat Party,⁵⁹ which was to be the focal point of a new autonomist movement. Beneath the generalised, often unclear demand for federalism, proposed as a panacea for all of the country's ills, an autonomist drive began to emerge on the part of some of the wealthiest northern regions, and in particular Veneto and Lombardy, the two regional strongholds of the NL party, which demanded greater autonomy, particularly with regard to fiscal matters. Unlike with previous forms, the new autonomism placed the emphasis not on questions of history and identity, but on the redistributive imbalances created by the aforesaid North-South divide. The mobilised northern regions claimed that they were being penalised by central state policies—some of which had failed badly, such as the *Intervento Straordinario per il Mezzogiorno*⁶⁰—insofar as they were designed to help the backward southern regions, but were funded by tax revenue generated in northern Italy. In keeping with

57. The reference is to the deep crisis affecting the Italian party system subsequent to the judicial investigations into political corruption (“tangentopoli”) that were to lead to the disappearance of Italy's two most important parties, which up until then had governed the country: the Christian Democrat Party and the Socialist Party.

58. Della Porta, *La politica locale*.

59. This party, which had governed the country continuously since 1948, enjoyed widespread support both in the more backward southern regions and in the more productive northern regions.

60. This programme of special measures, implemented from 1950 to 1992, involved the provision of massive funding for the development of the South; however, it failed to achieve the expected results.

the *pressure of the wealthiest areas*, a regional mobilisation witnessed in various European countries,⁶¹ Italy's northern regions demanded that they be given responsibility for their own economic development, and above all that they have greater fiscal autonomy, thus enabling them to have the tax revenue of their territories at their disposal.

The electoral success of NL—which encouraged the party to threaten the secession of the country's North—together with the specific political circumstances following the 1996 general election, which saw the victory of a coalition of centre-left reformist parties led by Romano Prodi, created favourable conditions for the reform of Italian regionalism in the spirit of federalism.

The reforms strengthened regional autonomy, through State laws reinforcing decentralisation and the regulatory role of the regions, but mainly through the amendment of the Italian Constitution (IC) by Constitutional Law no. 3/2001. This reform introduced a number of federal principles and guarantees, namely: the reversal of the principle of the distribution of legislative power, with a list of powers reserved for the State and the assignment of residual powers to the regions; the devolution of many powers of self-rule; a partial recognition of the principle of territorial representation; and, last but not least, fiscal federalism designed to grant all regions greater autonomy with regard to tax revenue and spending.⁶² A full federal transformation of the State was not achieved, as the reform of the Senate was not accomplished; however, the foundations were laid for such a transformation in the future.

The constitutional reform substantially reduced the gap between the level of autonomy of the SRs and that of the ORs, and with this in view, it introduced a *differentiated regionalism* clause representing an autonomist opening within the framework of a federal reform. More specifically, the new Article 116 IC embraced the distinction between *specialty* and *differentiation*, by making provision for a third type of region, namely: differentiated autonomy regions

61. Since the 1990s several highly developed European regions have pushed for autonomy in relation to the fiscal theme, demanding the right to rule their own development, as they believe that they have been penalised by the state redistributive policies designed to support the more backward regions, and to have their own tax revenue at their disposal, so as to have more resources to invest in goods and services for the benefit of their citizens. See, among others, Caciagli, *Regioni d'Europa*.

62. Baldini and Baldi, "Decentralization in Italy".

(DARs). This clause establishes that ORs wishing to acquire “further forms and particular conditions of autonomy” can adopt measures to become DARs. This right is not granted by virtue of any historical speciality, but is available to all ORs interested in acquiring such status; these regions may acquire greater autonomy by means of bottom-up action, through the pursuit of a bilateral agreement with the State, subsequently approved by Parliament. This autonomist clause was introduced in response to the strong mobilisation of Italy’s northern regions during that period, with some of them declaring secessionist intentions, in the event that the devolution of power provided for by the reform be deemed not to meet their demands.⁶³

The 2001 constitutional revision thus opened the way to Italian federalisation whilst not excluding autonomist developments in the future. It was a powerful, innovative reform which, however, was never fully implemented. The changing coalitions governing the country did not create favourable conditions for its implementation. The reform, passed by a centre-left government (1996-2001), was suspended by the subsequent centre-right government led by Silvio Berlusconi (2001-2006): his coalition included the NL, which immediately undertook to formulate a *true* federal reform—the so-called *reform of the reform*, in order to further strengthen the autonomy of all Italian regions (and in doing so, abolishing the *differentiated regionalism* clause), and to revise the Senate on the basis of principles of territorial representation. This new constitutional reform, which was passed in 2005, was, however, rejected by voters in the 2006 referendum, and in particular by citizens worried about the considerable diversity of welfare policies (mainly healthcare and education) that greater regional autonomy would have produced in the country.⁶⁴

In response to the outcome of the 2006 referendum, which represented a setback for Italian federalism, the only two regions where the majority of voters were in favour of the *reform of the reform*, namely Lombardy and Veneto, requested that they be granted differentiated autonomy under Article 116 IC, at a time when the country was led by a centre-left government (2006-2008). However, this process got bogged down almost immediately, and never reached the phase of bilateral negotiations with the State, due to the early ending of the legislature and the consequent general election, won

63. Mangiameli, “The Regions and the Reforms”.

64. Baldini and Baldi, “Decentralization in Italy”.

by the centre-right (2008). The NL was once again a member of the governing coalition, and promptly sought to achieve fiscal federalism, a question very dear to the two mobilised regions. Hence, Law no. 42 of 2009 was approved, together with the various implementing decrees; this reform provided for greater fiscal autonomy for all ORs through the territorialisation of tax revenues, within a framework designed, in any event, to guarantee the funding of essential public services across the country, through an equalising fund.

Yet, this fiscal reform never became operative either, due to the emergence of a new critical situation. The serious economic and financial crisis that hit western democracies in 2008 made it impossible to implement fiscal federalism. The need to keep public debt under control in order to comply with the European Stability Pact, and to endorse strong financial measures to overcome the recession, saw the adoption of re-centralisation policies, in particular by the *technical* government led by Mario Monti (2011-2013), that penalised regional autonomy, and not only in fiscal terms. Furthermore, from 2012 to 2014 a series of scandals were exposed concerning corruption and the waste of public money involving a number of regional politicians, leading to the resignation of chief political officers in various regions, and to a generalised discrediting of the workings of regional self-rule.⁶⁵ This contributed to a decade of profound crisis for the ORs, to the point where reversals in the reform agenda were envisaged. More specifically, the constitutional reform passed by the Renzi Government (2014-2016) provided for a substantial reduction in regional autonomy, by diminishing the degree of devolution provided for in the 2001 reform. Nevertheless, this reform failed to become operative as well, as it was also rejected by voters in the 2016 referendum.

Federal reforms thus remained unfulfilled, while a number of new centralist tendencies emerged in the country. After the enthusiasm witnessed during the 1990s, federalism was gradually side-lined, becoming increasingly absent from political debate, and losing support even among the NL's own electors; indeed, the NL, under the leadership of Matteo Salvini from 2014 onwards, abandoned its commitment to federalism to focus on new themes such as immigration and Euro-scepticism, considered more likely to lend the NL the status of a state-wide right-wing party.⁶⁶

65. Baldi, "Second Chamber Reform in Italy".

66. *Ibidem*.

5.3. An autonomist renewal in sight?

The time of federalism being over, as is the neo-centralist phase thanks to the waning of the economic crisis and the rejection of the 2016 constitutional reform proposal (which symbolised that period), favourable conditions have emerged for the re-launching of Italian regionalism after a decade of paralysis and oblivion.⁶⁷

In 2017, Lombardy, Veneto and Emilia-Romagna—three northern regions, among the richest in the country, which together account for 40% of Italy's GDP and with a joint population of almost 20 million—moved decisively in the direction of *differentiated regionalism*, by aiming to become DARs.

As in 2006, the initiative was taken by the Lombardy and Veneto regions, both governed by the NL at a time when it was once again an opposition party at national level. This would explain why the two regions decided to call for a consultative referendum—which was not necessary to start the procedure—in order to measure citizens' agreement with the request for greater autonomy, and above all for political strategy purposes given the pending general election.⁶⁸ The Emilia-Romagna region, which acted shortly afterwards, decided not to call a referendum, but simply consulted local governments as required by the constitutional procedure, thus avoiding any conflict with the national government, as the region was led by the Democratic Party, a member of the coalition governing the country.

The autonomist referendums held in the autumn of 2017 proved highly successful, particularly in Veneto where the quorum had been set at 50% of those entitled to vote, and where 57.2% actually voted, 98.1% of them in favour of greater autonomy. In Lombardy, where no quorum had been set, fewer people voted (only 38.2% of those entitled), but 96.0% of them were in favour of differentiated autonomy.

The mobilisation of the three regions, albeit in different forms, was followed by a phase of negotiations with the central government which resulted in the initial draft of bilateral agreements signed in February 2018, just prior

67. Rolla, "L'evoluzione dello Stato regionale in Italia".

68. Giovannini and Vampa, "Towards a new era of regionalism in Italy?".

to the general election. Those agreements provided for a limited devolution of powers, in only five out of the twenty-three possible areas envisaged by Article 116 IC.⁶⁹ The establishment of a new national government following the election, consisting of a coalition between the NL and the Five Star Movement (5SM), enabled negotiations to be resumed, and the mobilised regions were able to extend their requests. In May 2019, new bilateral agreements were formulated, granting: the Veneto region power over all twenty-three of the areas provided for by Article 116 IC; Lombardy power over twenty of the said areas; and Emilia-Romagna, power over sixteen of them. The new agreements confirmed Veneto as being the region with the greatest autonomist drive, while at the same time envisaging bilateral negotiations in which each region asked for diverse powers. However, these were only draft agreements: in order for them to become effective they need to be passed by Parliament, with an absolute majority, and such agreements may be questioned once again as a result of the establishment of a new national government following the political crisis of summer 2019, this time an alliance between the 5SM and the Democrat Party, with the NL among the opposition parties.

In the meantime, other regions declared their interest in becoming DARs. Currently, nearly all of the remaining ORs: seven of them (Campania, Liguria, Lazio, Marche, Piedmont, Tuscany and Umbria) have entrusted negotiations with the central government to their respective Presidents, while another three (Basilicata, Calabria and Puglia) have started preliminary proceedings.⁷⁰

In response to such mobilisations and demands, in November 2019 the Minister for Regional Affairs prepared a legislative proposal, discussed in the Council of Ministers but not yet in Parliament, which makes the signing of bilateral agreements for the devolution of differentiated regional autonomy subject to the definition of essential levels of services, to be ensured throughout the national territory, in the attempt to guarantee the preservation of the country's unity, as main parameters for evaluating the performance, financial needs and requests for greater autonomy of the Regions.⁷¹

69. Of the twenty-three areas, twenty relate to concurrent powers exercised by the regions (Article 117 IC), while three concern exclusive powers of the State that may be devolved (justice of the peace services, education, and environmental and cultural heritage protection).

70. Cammelli, "Centro e periferia".

71. Mancini, "Prove tecniche di regionalismo 'differenziato'".

Thus, a possible, albeit not certain, autonomist development for Italian regionalism is envisaged, although analysts do not agree on the outcome of such change: some emphasise the innovative potential, while others underline the intrinsic risks thereof.⁷²

The possible benefits include, on the one hand, the valorisation of regional specificities seen as vocations for development, and on the other hand, the generation of virtuous competitive dynamics, of both a vertical nature (between the State and the regions) and of a horizontal kind (between regions), with positive effects in terms of the overall performance of governmental action.⁷³ More specifically, in line with the principle of subsidiarity, the emphasis on territorial vocation is designed to encourage the regions to formulate their own vision for local development and growth, in order to ensure that public policies better fit the requirements of their communities, and to improve the efficiency of public service provision compared to that of central government. Since the autonomist option is open to all regions, it could feed a generalised virtuous competition, and in doing so have an upward effect whereby the best regional performances would be associated with greater levels of autonomy.⁷⁴ The more capable regions could thus couple up with those in difficulty, in a process of gradual enhancement of autonomy which would have positive effects on the regional system as a whole. This process will come about in the circumstance, which has yet to materialise within the current legislative framework, where the granting of differentiated autonomy is conditional upon certain standards of institutional efficiency and/or performance being met (e.g. financial solidity). Currently, in the absence of such parameters, and of instruments capable of measuring the regions' performance, the virtuous potential of territorial competition is likely to remain a theoretical one.⁷⁵ The legislative proposal by the Minister for Regional Affairs, mentioned above, can be seen as a first attempt to identify similar standards.

72. Ronchetti, "Differenziazione e disegualianze".

73. Russo, "Il regionalismo italiano nel vortice autonomistico della differenziazione". On the effects of such territorial competition in terms of the efficiency and effectiveness of public policies and services, see Grazzini *et al.*, "Asymmetric Decentralisation".

74. Viesti, Verso la secessione dei ricchi?

75. Zanardi, "Regionalismo differenziato".

Notwithstanding this potential of differentiated autonomy, several scholars have pointed out that serious financial uncertainty could have disruptive consequences on territorial cohesion.⁷⁶ Although a risk of disunity is inherent to autonomism, as we have seen, in the Italian case this risk is exacerbated by the North-South divide. Differentiated autonomy represents a threat to territorial cohesion, insofar as it could increase, rather than reduce, the country's existing socio-economic gap. The fear is that the wealthier regions could push for autonomy in order to circumvent their constitutional duty to aid the poorer regions. In fact, the demands of the Veneto and Lombardy regions, as in 2006, place the emphasis on the need to review the current redistributive mechanisms, which are considered to excessively penalise their growth, and request that they be allowed to withhold a substantial part of their own tax revenue, also in view of the fiscal autonomy granted to the SRs. Despite the fact that tax issues are not covered by differentiated autonomy pursuant to Article 116 IC, the Veneto and Lombardy regions insist that this process should grant them greater fiscal autonomy.⁷⁷ However, as explained in section three, fiscal asymmetry is an area reserved for the circumscribed logic of specialty, and not for the logic of differentiation, which on the contrary is open to all regions. If each region could negotiate its own level of fiscal autonomy, this would result in imbalances and competitive dynamics of such magnitude that the State's financial solidity could be undermined.

The pressing demands of Veneto and Lombardy have been influenced by their disappointment at the failed implementation of fiscal federalism, provided for by Law 42/2009. This reform, which for the moment remains suspended, would allow for greater fiscal autonomy, but on the basis of a federal design aimed at all ORs, and guaranteeing the funding of essential public services across the country, as well as compliance with the constitutional principle of territorial solidarity. Here lies the paradox: *differentiated regionalism* would not seem to respond to the demand for greater fiscal autonomy for the Veneto and Lombardy regions, in that tax matters are excluded from the bilateral negotiations envisaged therein; whereas greater fiscal autonomy could be achieved by the full implementation of fiscal federalism, an innovative scheme that has already been provided for but which has remained a dead letter, the legacy of past unfulfilled federal reforms.

76. See, among others, Russo, "Il regionalismo italiano nel vortice autonomistico della differenziazione"; Viesti, *Verso la secessione dei ricchi?*

77. Viesti, *ibidem*.

6. Conclusions

In Italy, after a slow start littered with crises and potential failures up until the period of federal reforms, which remain incomplete or broadly unfulfilled, the country's ORs may now be on the point of an autonomist breakthrough, which would bring them closer to the experience of the SRs, without prejudice to the distinction between *specialty* and *differentiation* embraced by the IC.

This breakthrough will result in variable asymmetries based on the vocation, the bottom-up activation and the negotiating capacities of individual regions, together with the State's willingness to devolve more powers. This is a rather surprising scenario given the history of the ORs, which were established through a top-down process on the basis of a symmetric design, and developed at the same speed in terms of powers and reforms, albeit in the presence of increasingly evident *de facto* asymmetries between the North and the South, specifically between wealthier and poorer regions, capable regions and regions struggling to exercise their own self-rule.⁷⁸ Differentiated autonomy aims to address these asymmetries in socio-economic development and regional performance, and to gradually overcome the existing gaps.

Nevertheless, an autonomist renewal for Italian regionalism is accompanied by a number of critical issues. For example, during the Covid-19 emergency, the push for regional differentiation did not favour the exercise of intergovernmental cooperation. Numerous conflicts occurred, and the regions had great difficulty in putting aside their autonomist drive to allow for national coordination.⁷⁹ As well as representing a risk to territorial cohesion, and in addition to the difficulties that the virtuous potential may encounter should parameters of efficiency and regional performance not be established, two concerns may be raised relating to the differences discussed between autonomism and federalism.

The first concern regards the abandonment of a federal vision which on the contrary could guarantee territorial integration, such integration being the more necessary, the greater the divide between regions. Actually, it is

78. Vassallo, *Il divario incolmabile*.

79. Cammelli, "Centro e periferia"; Mandato, "Stato-Regioni nella gestione del Covid-19".

surprising that the re-launch of Italian regionalism has not started with the implementation of fiscal federalism. Before embarking on a process of *differentiated regionalism* which could exacerbate, rather than mitigate, the North-South divide, it would seem more prudent to start from this fiscal reform, as it would offer the opportunity to meet some of the autonomist demands while at the same time guaranteeing territorial solidarity and the funding of basic services. The implementation of fiscal federalism could improve the equilibrium of the entire system of regional governance, while reducing the risk to territorial cohesion should some of the ORs subsequently become DARs.

The second concern regards the political and cultural conditions required in order to effectively accomplish *differentiated regionalism* which, by definition, is bound to produce a substantial differentiation of public policies across the country, including in important sectors for social citizenship, such as education and healthcare. Public support for an autonomist shift implies the acceptance of a significant diversity in welfare policies by citizens traditionally used to the uniformity of the ORs' powers. Thus, an autonomist renewal implies a radical transformation of Italian regionalism and raises the question of whether citizens are actually prepared to accept a considerable regional differentiation of public policies. In this regard, account must be taken of the outcome of the 2006 referendum which rejected the constitutional *reform of the reform* proposed by the NL for the very fear of there being overly diverse regional welfare policies. As a matter of fact, various scholars have repeatedly pointed out the absence in Italy of a true political culture of autonomy,⁸⁰ that is, the propensity to accept that diversification of rules and policies which comes with the exercise of self-rule. The Italian cultural resistance to such diversification is grounded in a strongly unitary, fundamentally uniform view of public policy in terms of both the objectives to be pursued and the service standards to be guaranteed. This persistent centralist culture has not helped the achievement of federalism, and it is difficult to imagine that it can now sustain autonomism which would lead to an even greater degree of differentiation since it is based on the asymmetry of powers, the primacy of bilateral relations, and the competition between regions for their level of autonomy.

80. See, among others, Baldini and Baldi, "Decentralization in Italy"; Palermo, and Valdesalici, "Irreversibly Different".

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