

# ***Federalizzazione dell'Italia: the transition of the Italian political system through the lenses of constructivist institutionalism***

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## **Abstract**

Italy is a state, standing at the crossroads of federalisation. This article traces the ideational and practical application of the federalisation process in Italy, from the lenses of the constructivist institutional theory by Colin Hay and with the application of process-tracing methodology. The research is centred on the critical junctures and the ideas behind each stage of federalisation since the Tangentopoli crisis of the 1990s. The research findings demonstrate that, firstly, federalisation in Italy is an elite-driven process, where the politicians' interpretation of Italian federalism affects the outcome of institutional change. Secondly, federalism is a politicised idea, which Italian society and political elite interpret as "the tool for efficient governance" or "the remedy for corruption". Thirdly, federalism is a supplementary topic in the Italian discourse, which yields ideas connected with economic, social, and political reforms. However, federalism can be used to reinforce the policies from these three layers.

**Keywords:** constructivist institutionalism, Colin Hay's constructivist institutional theory, process-tracing methodology, federalisation, institutional change, Italian federalism

## ***Federalizzazione dell'Italia: transformacja włoskiego systemu politycznego przez pryzmat konstruktywistycznego instytucjonalizmu***

### **Streszczenie**

Włochy są państwem stojącym na rozdrożu federalizacji. W niniejszym artykule prześledzono ideowe i praktyczne zastosowanie procesu federalizacji we Włoszech, z perspektywy konstruktywistycznej teorii instytucjonalnej Colina Haya oraz z zastosowaniem metodologii *process-tracing*. Badania koncentrują się na krytycznych momentach i ideach stojących za każdym etapem fede-

ralizacji od czasu kryzysu w Tangentopoli w latach dziewięćdziesiątych. Wyniki zrealizowanych badań wskazują, że, po pierwsze, federalizacja we Włoszech jest procesem kierowanym przez elity, a interpretacja włoskiego federalizmu przez polityków wpływa na wynik zmian instytucjonalnych. Po drugie, federalizm jest ideą upolitycznioną, którą włoskie społeczeństwo i elity polityczne interpretują jako „narzędzie skutecznego rządzenia” lub „remedium na korupcję”. Po trzecie, federalizm jest tematem uzupełniającym w dyskursie włoskim, z którego rodzą się idee związane z reformami gospodarczymi, społecznymi i politycznymi. Federalizm można jednak wykorzystać do wzmocnienia polityk z tych trzech warstw.

**Słowa kluczowe:** konstruktywistyczny instytucjonalizm, metodologia śledzenia procesów, federalizacja, zmiana instytucjonalna, federalizm włoski

The Italian political system and its transformations are unique for political analysis and the study of federalism. Symmetrical bicameralism, weak regional representation in the Senate on the one hand, but considerable decentralisation of the state authority and devolution of legislative competencies to the regions – on the other hand. The controversy between the national and subnational levels of governance is inherent in the Italian political system. The ambiguous development of this relationship presupposed the appearance of federal ideas. The difference in social, political, and economic characteristics of the Italian regions prevent this topic from disappearance. Hence, Italy is a unitary state, which has been going through a federalisation process.

This article traces back the process of Italian federalisation with the pursuit to analyse: how the federalisation has been developing and what is the prominence of the process today. The article presents the ideational and practical application of the federalisation process in Italy, from the lenses of the constructivist institutional theory by Colin Hay. Accordingly, the research is concentrated on the critical junctures and the ideas behind each stage of federalisation since the beginning of the 1990s with the assistance of the qualitative **process-tracing methodology**. In particular, this method is applied to analyse the micro- and macro-processes of federalisation and to answer the following **research questions**:

RQ1: What is the pattern of micro-process of federalisation in Italy after Tangentopoli?

RQ2: What is the pattern of the macro-process of federalisation in Italy after Tangentopoli?

There are **two hypotheses** formulated in the research:

H1: The pattern of micro-process of federalisation in Italy is elite-driven, the federalisation reforms are essentially politicised, while federal reforms are not isolated and usually supplementary to major reform.

H2: The pattern of macro-process of federalisation in Italy is non-linear, depending on the success of the major reform.

By answering the above-mentioned questions, it can be possible to analyse the prospects of the federalisation process and probable inferences for the Italian political system.

## **Constructivist institutionalist vision of federalisation and the process-tracing method**

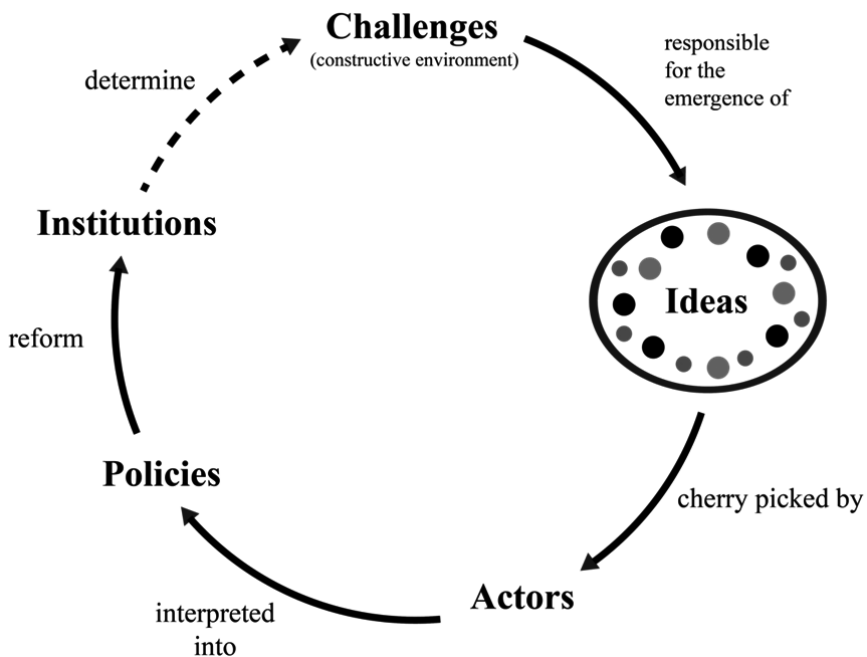
Before turning to theoretical and methodological description, it is vital to articulate the terms *federation*, *federalism* and *federalisation*. The *federation* is an entity that reifies the federal principles such as "self-rule of the regions and *shared rule* with the central government" (Elazar 1991: p. 5). It also can be defined as a system, where "the central government incorporates the regions into the decision-making processes, entrenched by the constitution" (King 1982: p. 77). Hence, the decentralisation and the division of competencies between the state and its regions are crucial for a federal state. However, the definition of this concept hardly describes all features of the federal state as the establishment of the federation depends on the particular vision of the national-subnational arrangements. The theory of federation or *federalism* stands behind these arrangements, "advocating federal principles" (Watts 1998: p. 119–120) and articulating the set of ideas on the development of the federal characteristics inside the state. It is important to distinguish the visions of federalism from *federalisation*. The latter characterises the process through which federalist ideas are implemented into the institutions. The subject of the article is the process of implementing visions of federalism into federalisation.

Constructivist institutional theory by Colin Hay is congruent with the analysis of this topic. Hay distinguishes two main sources of his theory: social constructivism and historical institutionalism (Hay 2008: p. 8–10). The former theory brings up the notion that the political realm is the consequence of social mobilisation so that the ideas construct reality (Reus-Smit 2005). However, Hay states that Peter A. Hall's version of historical institutionalism (HI) constitutes the lion's share of his theoretical framework. Correspondingly, HI is concentrated less on the analysis of the institutions per se, but more on the history of their construction and canvasses path dependency of institutional construction, "focusing on socioeconomic development and diffusion of ideas" (Hall, Taylor 1996: p. 10). Another merit of HI is the concept of the critical juncture that reifies "the moments of profound fluidity where important events create the need for institutional responses" (Koppa 2022). In practical terms, these are usually the reforms that considerably influence the subsequent federalisation efforts and establish the dynamic of the process.

Initially, constructivist institutionalism analyses the process of institutionalisation in the political context. Hay takes Hall's idea of institutional path dependency, stating that the process of institutionalisation assures the state of the institution itself (Hay 2008: p. 9). The process, however, is realised by the political actors that are strategic in nature and endeavour "contingent and constantly changing goals" (Hay 2008: p. 8). Dissimilar to rational theories, the actor's interests are not materially constructed. Hay accurately links the theory with the essence of social constructivism, claiming that the environment and ideas influence actors' decisions (Hay 2008: p. 12–13). The actors ideationally interpret the ideas of the policies originating from the society and afterwards, try to implement them into the institutions. As a result, the theory intentionally politicises

institutionalisation, concentrating on the interest of the actors and the environment. Hay's approach includes two main chains of relations: ideational environment and actor's interest on the one hand, and the actor's actions influence on the institutional design – on the other. The first one is the micro-process of institutional change, where the particular institutional path is created. Accordingly, institutional change "is the strategic conduct of the actors in the context" (Hay 2008: p. 9). In the micro-process of institutional change, the actors choose the policy options, based on the idea that they have. *Figure 1* presents the theoretical framework of the micro-process of federalisation based on constructivist institutional assumptions. Actors adopt federalist ideas from the *constructivist environment* of Italian politics. Afterwards, the actors tried to reify their vision of federalism into a particular policy for reforming the Italian unitary constitution. In the end, the reform shaped the political institutions following the federal reform. Thus, the micro-process is *actor-centred*, *politicised*, *ideationally constructed*, and implemented via *federal reform*.

**Figure 1: Micro-process of federalisation.**



Source: author's own elaboration

Essentially, the micro-process of federalisation exists at the moment of critical juncture, which allows the political actor to promote federal change. The macro-process of the federalisation trajectory, though, connects through the critical junctures and

concentrates on the change in the federalisation process, putting it into the broader context. As historical institutionalism is part of new institutionalism, the path dependency wanes and loses its importance in the macro-process. Macro-process of federalisation is unpredictable and politically determined, and the direction of the change is not linear or progressive, it can roll out as well. Moreover, the macro-process does not only involve the critical junctures, because between them there is the process of reform adaptation and implementation, which can also influence the trajectory of the federalisation process. Hence, the macro-process model can be formulated only after the analysis.

For the application of the theoretical framework, a qualitative process-tracing method will be used (Bennett, Checkel 2015; Checkel 2008; Collier 2011). Essentially, this method is focused on tracing the sequences of events that lead to particular developments in the present. The method will be applied from two dimensions. Firstly, the article is concentrated on tracing Italian federalist ideas through the analysis of key federal scholars since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Italian federalism is the basis for the contemporary debates in the state, so analysing federalism will pave the way for analysing the micro- and macro-processes of federalisation. The former will be analysed through the description of particular developments during the critical junctures of federal transition in Italy on the brink of *Tangentopoli*. The applied method will assist in tracing the process of reform creation, juxtaposing it to a constructivist institutionalist vision of micro-processes. The review of academic books and journals will also be used for analysis of the federalisation process in Italy in both dimensions.

## Italian federalism

There are three influential traditions in Italian federal studies. Firstly, there was the idea to create a federation with the leading role of the central authorities, developed mainly by Carlo Cattaneo. His federal vision of unification was based on the idea of liberty. In *Sulla legge comunale e provinciale*, he supported human autonomy, which would result in the emancipation of the regions, allowing their self-determination (Cattaneo 1865; Cattaneo, Bobbio 2010). For him, federalism is a down-top phenomenon (Lis 2022: p. 425). When his ideas were lost in "a battle for unification" during *Risorgimento*, he proposed the devolution of the state competencies to the Italian regions. Cattaneo's thought, albeit, devoted an extremely important role for the central authorities to control the process of federal development. This view of federalism relates to the later theory of *cooperative federalism*, which determines the partnership between national and subnational levels of governance, in pursuit of common ground and more efficient decision-making process (Weiser 2001: p. 664–673), merging in polyphony – "the true sound of federalism" (Schapiro 2005: p. 13–15).

Secondly, as a counterweight to cooperative federalism, there exists the concept of *dual federalism*. The proponents of the idea claim that the interaction between the levels should be a zero-sum game of independent players on the policy issue, leading to a clear distribution of competencies (Greve 2000). Gaetano Salvemini (1955)

supported this approach, delineating Italian federalism from the Southern perspective, aiming for progress in the *Mezzogiorno*, the other name of the Southern Italy (Lembo 2020: p. 23). In particular, he was a proponent of local taxation, resource allocation, and political regionalism in the South (Lis 2022: p. 429). Being a socialist, Salvemini relied on the state in the questions of the national interest and external safety (Colombo 2014: p. 126). However, the economic difficulties that the South faced at the beginning of the XX century forced Salvemini to reconsider the intransigence of his views. *Mezzogiorno* heavily relied on the more industrialised North, so his idea of Southern autonomism waned. Another proponent of southern autonomism was Luigi Sturzo, who supported the idea that Sicilian autonomism would resolve economic exploitation (Gargano 1999). To draw parallels with contemporary terminology, Sturzo was a proponent of *asymmetric federalism*. Asymmetries determine the different levels of authority over particular issues in the subnational units (Watts 1998: p. 122–123).

The last category of the Italian federal scholars involved in the issue of *decentralisation* of the Italian regions. For instance, Giuseppe Ferrari was the proponent of forming the decentralised polity from below, arguing that each Italian state has to create a separate constitution. As a result, these states will merge into a single alliance, based on their commonality (Ferrari 1852: p. 120). Consequently, cultural diversity determines the consociation, but linguistic similarity constitutes the natural unification (Schiattoni 1996). Finally, he proposed the idea of “the Senate of Sovereigns”, consisting of the regional rulers and convoked for the decision-making process of the regional-state competencies (Ferrari 1854). Some of the traits of these approaches even could be presented as the proponents of confederalism, such as Ciccotti, who was inspired by the Swiss example of a confederal state (Ciccotti 1899). Hence, the proponents of decentralisation suggested the Italian union, instead of the Italian unity (Ulloa 1867). In conclusion, the Italian federalist ideas had to develop inside the unitary state, so that decentralisation became the main topic for discussion. Most of them were involved in the making of the Italian state, but their practical contribution turned out to be feeble. However, their influence on the idea of federalism brought up the concepts, creating the constructive environment for the federalisation process.

### **Constructive environment**

The dynamics of the micro-process of federalisation can be harnessed through the critical junctures that shaped this process. Those critical junctures essentialise the environment of the reforms, a federalist vision of the political actors and the attempt to introduce this vision into the policies to reform the political institutions for a particular federalist vision. From 1990s eight important events fit the description of federal critical junctures in Italian context: establishment of the Law N° 142 in 1990, 1992–1994 De Mita–lotti Commission, Bassanini’s reforms and Constitutional Amendments 1999–2001, Judgement N° 303/2003, Constitutional Reform in 2005, Law N° 42/2009 or fiscal federalism reform, Constitutional Reform in 2013 and, finally, 2017 Advisory referendum

in Lombardia and Veneto. This part of the analysis applies the theoretical model of the micro-process of federalisation to the following critical junctures.

The preconditions before reform implementation constitute a constructive environment. It also presupposes the conditions, under which the possibility of reform implementation increases. The Law N° 142/1990 was an attempt to provide clarity on the role of the regions and localities by the *Pentapartito* government, consisting of five parties with the leadership of *Partito Socialista Italiano* (PSI) and *Democrazia Cristiana* (DC), belonging to the First Italian Republic. The lack of regional diversity in the legislation and the demand to resolve this issue were among the primary motivations for the law adoption. During the next years, Italy has been actively reforming in the sphere of regionalisation. The main catalyst for the active reform phase was the revelation of the first republic deficiencies in the form of the *Tangentopoli scandal*, which was accompanied by the detention of Italian politicians on corruption grounds. As a result, there was a need to revitalise the political system by resolving structural issues. Those issues assured the Grand Reform attempt by the 1992–1994 De Mita–Iotti Commission.

After the informal collapse of the First Republic due to *Tangentopoli scandal*, the new elections presupposed the new political actors with the ideas to significantly revise Italian governance. The success of left-wing parties in 1996 determined the direction of the reforms from 1997 until 2001, as well as the Judgement N° 303/2003, which determined the direction of reform implementation. Subsequently, the 2001 elections, in which the right-wing coalition won, augmented the effects of the reaction to the left-wing reforms. In pursuit of superseding the amendments of 1997–2001 and promoting the alternative vision of federalism, the right-wing coalition proposed the 2005 Constitutional Reform. As the Grand Reform of the right-wing coalition was rejected in the 2006 referendum, ensuing federal reforms were convoked under the 1997–2001 framework umbrella, such as Law 42/2009.

Lastly, the political turmoil of the 2010s was provoked by the collapse of the right-wing coalition in 2011. The President of the Republic, Giorgio Napolitano, being in the destabilised environment, took the lead in the reform process. Those conditions resuscitated the idea of the Grand Reform, which was, initially, unsuccessfully attempted by Enrico Letta and, later, subjugated to Matteo Renzi's leadership. Nonetheless, the reform failed in the 2016 referendum, the decentralisation idea found solid ground in Lombardia and Veneto, where two *Lega Nord* (LN) regional presidents organised the advisory autonomist referendums in 2017. All in all, the constructive environment has always predetermined the political foundations of the federalisation process and determined the need for action.

## Visions of federalism

The added value to the constructive environment was the federal ideas in the above-mentioned critical junctures. The content of the reforms conforms to the federalist visions described in the historical part of the analysis. In particular, Cattaneo's view of localities' independence and cooperative federalism was actual for four reforms. Firstly, the main

motivation for the Law N° 142/1990, according to Giannini, was “to satisfy the regional diversity, more than to improve the public administration” (Vesperini 2009: p. 958). Secondly, the 1997–2001 reforms were focused on the re-allocation of the competencies to the regional level of governance and the reduction of the governmental control over the subnational units (Bassanini 2011: p. 9), as well as increasing the level of autonomy and regionalisation (Cento Bull 2002: p. 190). Those changes introduced the cooperative federalist principle. Thirdly, Judgement N° 303/2003 not only reinforced the cooperative federalist vision of the 1997–2001 reforms, but also enhanced the unitary integrity of the state. The principle of *loyal cooperation*, which determined the Constitutional Court’s support of the central government in the allocation of shared competencies, determined also the less decentralised direction of the reform (Panzeri 2017: p. 159–185). Lastly, the Law N° 42/2009, unlike the other reforms of the 2000s, implemented the 2001 reform, so Claudio Tucciarelli accurately concluded the reform of fiscal federalism in 2009, stating: “Si scrive «federalismo fiscale» ma si legge «attuazione del Titolo V»” that can be translated as: “It is written «fiscal federalism», but it reads «implementation of Title V»” (Tucciarelli 2010: p. 27).

Unlike Cattaneo’s federalism, Sturzo’s and Salvemini’s ideas were partially revised. Essentially, their vision of dual federalism persisted, but the Southern Regions were not accentuated in the process. The other four reforms counterweighted Cattaneo’s cooperative federalism. In 1992–1994 De Mita–Iotti Commission attempted to allocate the competencies between the regions and the central government. Constitutional Reform in 2005 assured the high level of devolution, demanded by LN, entitling the regional exclusive competencies over healthcare, police, and education (Bull 2007: p. 104). Importantly, this vision met the intellectual support from the contribution of Gianfranco Miglio to the ideological backbone for parties’ federalism. Miglio was overtly critical of the political corruption of the politicians, insinuating their influence on economic problems in Italy, and proposing a federal solution. He demanded a more autonomous development of the north from the “southern laggard” (Miglio 1991; Miglio 1994: p. 35).

Constitutional amendment in 2013 proposed legislation that contained similarities with the 2005 reform, relating the initiative to majoritarian premiership and extensive decentralisation (Blokker 2020: p. 22–27), with stricter distribution of competencies. Lastly, 2017 Advisory Referendums conform to Sturzo’s asymmetric federalism and autonomism, though applied to the Northern Regions instead of the Southern. Ferrari’s decentralisation vision was visible in all of the reform attempts with different levels of devolution: higher in dual federal cases and lower in cooperative federalism. All in all, federalism is responsible for the ideational part of the federalisation process.

## Political Actors

Political parties and politicians, responsible for adopting the federal idea in the constructive environment, differentiated through time. In the last period of the First Republic, the parliamentary group led by PSI’s member Massimo Severo Giannini



formulated the initiative that would become the Ordinary Law N° 142 in 1990. During Mani Pulite investigation, President Scalfaro took an active role in appointing Carlo Azeglio Ciampi with the main task of providing the pivotal reforms of the public administration for countering the economic burden of the administration costs (Cananea 1996). The goal was to revive the parties of the First Republic in line with the extensive corruption scandal, thus Ciampi's government established the Constitutional Committee on 6 August 1993, consisting of the inter-party collaboration between DC's leader Ciriaco De Mita and PCI's Nilde Iotti.

After the unavoidable collapse of the First Republic, the new parties entered the political scene. *Lega Nord* (LN), *Forza Italia* (FI) and *Partito Democratico della Sinistra* (PDS) were new factions, while *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN), *Partito della Rifondazione Comunista* (PRC), and *Democrazia Cristiana* (DC) – the rethinking of the predecessors. Almost immediately, the parliamentary committee was established by the agreement of the major party leaders: Silvio Berlusconi, Gianfranco Fini, and Massimo D'Alema. The commission was led by Giuliano Urbani (FI), Domenico Fisichella (AN) Cesare Salvi (PDS), and most notably Franco Bassanini (PDS) (Bassanini 2011). Later, the left-wing forces led by Prodi and D'Alema facilitated constitutional reform by establishing another constitutional committee in January 1997. AN and FI were reluctant to accept the reform, insisting on the majoritarian electoral system and stronger position of the government's leader instead of reinforcing the President of the Republic proposed in the reform (Pasquino 1998: p. 47), which assured AN, FI, and RC opting out of it. D'Alema, as the next leader of the government led the "Title V" of the constitution, regarding the regions, provinces, and municipalities, formulated into constitutional laws 1/1999 and 3/2001.

The further period was characterised by the reaction of the dissatisfied right-wing forces against the 1997–2001 reforms. The main critique was coming from *Lega Nord*, which was reluctant to accept the concurrent legislation between the central and regional authorities and supported the strict division of competencies as well as the expansion of regional autonomy. At the same time, AN and FI were dissatisfied with the lack of reform of the chief executive, which they endorsed, similar to the De Mita-Iotti draft. However, the Constitutional Court sided with the 1997–2001 reform on the grounds of the loyal cooperation principle, usually ruling in favour of the central authority in "Title V" cases, which in 2003 and 2004 amounted to 24.35 and 49.33 of all Constitutional Cases accordingly (Rullo 2022: p. 7).

Before Law 42/2009, there were no contentions on the subject of the reform, so the parliament adopted it without significant impediments. The chief perpetrators were *Il Popolo della Libertà* (PdL), led by Silvio Berlusconi, while the other parties were also mainly standing for reform. Even the salient political opponents of PdL – *Partito Democratico* (PD) – have not endeavoured to reject the bill, simply abstaining from the vote. The only exception was UdC, which was strong in the South and did not endorse the reform (Farinelli, Massetti 2011: p. 700). However, after the dissolution of Berlusconi's government in 2011, the political climate destabilised. After the brief technocratic

government of Mario Monti, the results of the 2013 elections assured the difficulty in the government formation, leading to the broad government with the PD leadership of Enrico Letta.

The Presidential position one more time started stabilising the political system, so Giorgio Napolitano has been the main reason for the PD-UdC – PdL-RI government. Reluctant to be elected for the second term, Napolitano initiated the motion for constitutional reformation in Italy. He did not have any position of federalisation and never contributed to the content of Letta's reform. What he did was an impetus to improve the Italian system, no matter how (Pasquino, Valbruzzi 2017: p. 148). Enrico Letta started the implementation of the Constitutional Reform, but after another political turmoil, Matteo Renzi became the leader of the Cabinet. Renzi continued Napolitano's direction of the Constitutional Reform; though he refused to harness Letta's draft proposals (Blokker 2017: p. 132) and together with Minister Boschi, he proposed the 2013 Constitutional Amendment.

Lastly, after the collapse of Renzi's government, the 2017 referendums in Lombardia were initiated by Luca Zaia and Roberto Moroni accordingly. These referendums provoked the spill-over of the autonomy discussions in twelve other Italian regions, so the motion is not exclusively Northern (Giovannini, Vampa 2020: p. 593–594). Hence, even with the failed 2016 reforms the internal motions from the regions demand the extension of federalisation in Italy. All in all, the political actor's leadership in the process assured politicisation and actor-centredness of the federalisation.

### **Policies, effects and outcomes**

Finally, the political actors formulate policies in the last coil of the federalisation process. There are four policies in the analysis, which were successfully implemented. Law N° 142 in 1990 enhanced the liberties of the regions and localities and was the basis for subsequent reforms, so 77% of the law articles have been reviewed in the reforms of the 90s (Vesperini 2009: p. 961). The reforms of 1997–2001 concerned the re-allocation of the competencies to the regional level of governance, the reduction of the governmental control over the subnational units (Bassanini 2011: p. 9) rationalised and simplified public administration by reducing the number of politicians and attuning some public administrative processes (OECD 2001: p. 13). Cooperative federalism is still the basis for the relationship between regions and the central authority. Judgement N° 303/2003, reinforced the role of the government *vis-à-vis* the regions in concurrent competencies allocation. Fiscal federalism reform in 2009 made the regions more responsible for the allocation of finances, as well as the tax rates (Rodean 2012: p. 223), so that the local and regional taxes are established, while the reform avoids the issue of double taxation of the same amount both by the state and the region (Scuto 2010: p. 77). After the reform, the reliance on the own taxes in budgeting increased to more than 40%, making the regions less dependent on grants than before, even if they constitute a considerable part of the revenues (Mussari, Giordano 2013: p. 35).

However, the other half of the reforms never made it into policies. In 1992–1994, De Mita–lotti Commission attempted to allocate the competencies between the regions and the central government as well as enhance the competencies of the leader of the government. The state was to be responsible for 16 policy competencies (Bassanini 2011: p. 6) but failed after the government’s collapse. In the 2005 Constitutional Amendment, LN demanded a high level of devolution and entitled the regional exclusive competencies over healthcare, police, and education (Bull 2007: p. 104), while Berlusconi and Gianfranco Fini, similarly to De Mita–lotti proposal, strived to enhance the position of the President of the Council, or *presidentialismo* (Bull 2007: p. 104). The referendum in 2006 decided the fate of the reform and the government, as 61.3% of the voters rejected the reform. Similarly, Renzi bet his Council of Minister leadership on that referendum, promising to step down from office, what he did after the referendum failure (Bergman 2019). He proposed the reform of the Senate into a body of regional representation, consisting of 95 senators elected by the Regional Councils plus senators for life and was to enhance the role of the President of the Minister’s Council. Lastly, 2017 referendums were adopted with an overwhelming majority: Veneto – 98.1% for the reform with a 57.2% turnout; Lombardy – 95.3% also supported the changes with a 38.3% turnout, but were advisory. In conclusion, federalisation is reform-based and non-linear, depending on the success of the policy adoption. Moreover, it is usually a supplementary topic to political contentions or strives for other purposes such as legitimisation of the system, resolving the political crisis or enhancing *presidentialismo*.

**Table 1: Critical junctures and micro-process of federalisation**

Reform	Constructive environment	Ideas	Actors	Policies and effects	Outcomes
<b>Law 142/1990</b>	<i>Pentapartito</i> government, the <i>partito-crazia</i> and <i>transformismo</i> . Regional diversity over improvement the public administration	Independence of localities and regions <i>vis-à-vis</i> the state (similar to Ferrari’s and Cattaneo’s vision)	<i>Democrazia Cristiana</i> (DC); <i>Partito Socialista</i> (PS); <i>Partito Socialista Democratico Italiano</i> (PSDI); <i>Partito Repubblicano Italiano</i> (PRI); <i>Partito Liberale Italiano</i> (PLI). Reform led by Massimo Severo Giannini	The provinces and municipalities became more autonomous from the central state	Adopted. Raw regionalisation reform that demanded further amendments, pushed federalisation in the 90s and was the basis for subsequent reforms

<b>1992-1994 De Mitterrand Commission</b>	<i>Tangentopoli</i> attempted to legitimise "the First Republic"	Dual federalism (Salvemini's & Sturzo's visions, but without referring to the North/South divide)	All major parties of the First Republic, with the leadership of Ciriaco De Mita (DC) & Nilde Iotti (PCI)	Stricter allocation of competencies between the regions and the state; stronger Presidency	Failed due to the dissolution of "the First Republic". Was a basis for the later Grand Reforms.
<b>1997-2001 Constitutional Reforms</b>	Beginning of "the Second Republic", new parties, demanded extensive reforms of the governance	Cooperative federalism (Cattaneo & Ferrari), continuation of 142/1990	Centre-left coalition with the leadership of Franco Bassanini, Romano Prodi and, later, Massimo D'Alema with Giuliano Amato	Reform of Title V. Establishment of cooperative federalism with shared competencies between the state and the regions	Adopted. Has become the basis of the Italian system to this day. Extreme dissatisfaction with the right-wing coalition
<b>Judgement 303/2003</b>	Implementation of 1997–2001 Constitutional Reforms	Cooperative federalism (Cattaneo & Ferrari), loyal cooperation of the Constitutional Court	Constitutional Court	Assigned to the national government the task of locating public and private infrastructures and strategic production sites pertinent to developing and modernising the country	Approved. Set the state dominance in concurrent legislation
<b>2005 Constitutional Reform</b>	Reaction to 1997–2001 Constitutional Reforms from the right-wing coalition	Dual federalism, based on the 1992–1994 De Mitterrand Commission. LN with Miglio's ideas backing and upheld Salvemini's/ Sturzo's vision on the North/South divide. AN & FI – <i>presidentialismo</i>	FI, LN & AN, led by Silvio Berlusconi, Umberto Bossi & Gianfranco Fini accordingly	Stricter division of competencies, <i>presidentialismo</i> . Rejecting 1997–2001 Constitutional Reforms	Failed on 2006 referendum and dissolution of the right-wing government

<b>Law 42/2009</b>	Reforms under the 1997–2001 Constitutional Reforms umbrella. Need for fiscal competencies allocation between the state and the regions	Fiscal federalism (Cattaneo's & Ferrari's view of regional liberty)	PdL with the support of the other parties and PD abstention	Regional taxation is more for the region, avoiding double taxation, and more autonomy for regional expenditure	Adopted. The reliance of the regions on their own taxation increased to more than 40%
<b>2013 Constitutional Reform</b>	The collapse of the right-wing coalition in 2011. President Giorgio Napolitano demanded for reform of the governance. Faile Letta's reform	Dual federalism, based on the De Mita–lotti Commission (Salvemini & Sturzo). Enhancing <i>presidentialismo</i>	PD under Matteo Renzi's leadership	Making the Senate a body for regional representation, decentralisation, majoritarian premiership	Failed on 2016 referendum and Renzi's resignation
<b>2017 Advisory referendums in Lombardia and Veneto</b>	Pro-autonomist presidents of Lombardia and Veneto. Failed 2016 referendum	Autonomism & asymmetric federalism (Sturzo)	Luca Zaia & Roberto Moroni (LN)	Autonomy of both Lombardia and Veneto	Positive results of the referendum, but advisory. Surge of autonomism in other regions

Source: author's own elaboration based on research material.

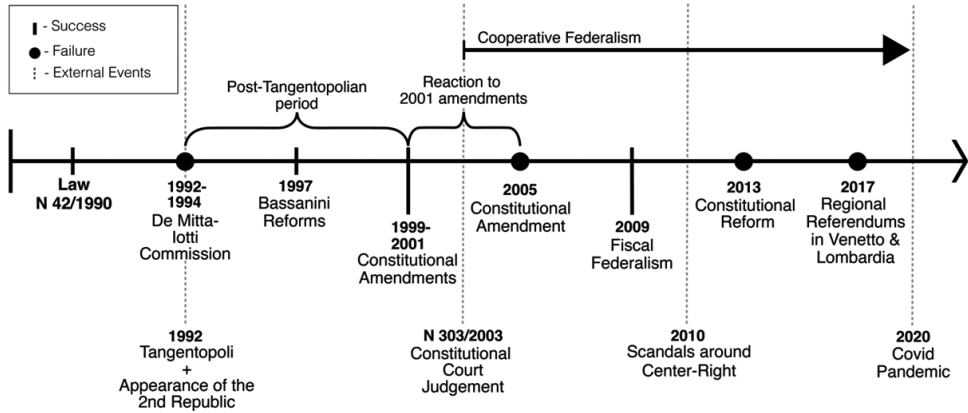
## The dynamics of micro- and macro-processes of institutional change

The ideas of Cattaneo, Salvemini, Sturzo, and Ferrari influenced the formulation of the system problems and ideational proposed solutions. Ferrari's decentralisation was a focal point of each critical juncture. The contention between cooperative and dual federalist visions was prominent throughout the process. Furthermore, the federal reforms are inseparable from the political actors, who initiated the reform based on their vision. Therefore, the process is actor-centred and pushed by the political class. Besides, federalisation is extremely politicised in Italy. Almost every federal reform was influenced by political conflicts over the reform formulation.

Federalism has become the political obligation for all parties (Roux 2010: p. 64). It is claimed to resolve the inefficiencies of the system of governance and usually is tried to be established along the other reform initiatives, but only 56% of the Italian public considers the federal issue important; it yields the topics of unemployment, immigration, justice, education, etc. (Roux 2008: p. 335). Consequently, federalism is the topic that is generally endorsed, but not essentially preoccupied with and supplementary to the other reform areas. The micro-process can end either in reform institutionalisation or in failure to be adopted, making the macro-process trajectory non-linear. It depends on multiple circumstances: stability of the parliamentary majority, resistance from the opposition, or even failure of the referendum. Nonetheless, the activity of either institutionalised or non-institutionalised reform usually persists and influences the later constructive environment.

From the macro-process perspective, federalisation is achieved through reforms consisting of critical junctures. *Figure 2* exemplifies the macro-process of federalisation through the critical junctures. The constitutional reforms of 1997–2001 set the current federalisation dynamics. *Figure 2* also identifies the external shocks that the Italian political system overcame through federalisation, usually conforming to the same periods when critical junctures occur. The only exception is the COVID-19 pandemic, but there is not enough time passed to conclude that there would be no other critical juncture of federalisation. However, the confusing regional competencies have led to the disorganisation of the regional response to the state of emergency. Health policy is one of the concurrent competencies, which the regions have been striving for. So, the health policy in Italy is extremely differentiated from region to region (Bosa et al. 2021). The difference in responses was the source of inefficiency and differentiation in response. As a result, the national government *de facto* took hold of the situation, by issuing common rules during the pandemic. Nevertheless, the regions had the right to implement their regional legislations, these legislations depended on the central state agenda. In particular, the regions could introduce stricter quarantine measures, but not softer than the central government announced (Alber 2020). Hence, after 2001 all subsequent federal reforms occurred under its umbrella of cooperative federalism.

Other macro-processes reiterate through the federalisation, especially *La Grande Riforma* of De Mita–Iotti Commission in 1993–1994, Constitutional amendments after Bassanini acts in 1999–2001, Constitutional reform in 2005 proposed by the centre-right, and 2013 Renzi's Constitutional reform. Only in 2001 was Constitutional reform made into the legislation, while the other efforts have never been in place. Lastly, the conflict between the regions and the centre is the leitmotif of Italian federalisation. After the 2001 reform, the position of the regions was reinforced with the concurrent competencies in legislation and the conflicts in the Constitutional Court increased. However, the framework of cooperative federalism decreases the ability of the regions for self-sufficient actions and reinforces the position of the central authority. As a result, the system has the comparative decentralisation of the regions, but the central government sets the rules for cooperation. Based on reiterative trends of both micro- and macro-processes, there is no expectation that this dynamic of federalisation would change.

**Figure 2: Macro-process of federalisation**

Source: author's own work

## Conclusions

The author used in this article the process-tracing method to explain the dynamic of federalisation in the Italian context, while constructivist institutional theory is perfectly applicable to the explanation of trends in this process. The Italian federalism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century influenced the process of federalisation. The issue of differentiation between the South and North provided Salvemini with a federal solution. Carlo Cattaneo's federalism attempted to resolve the contention between the regions and the state on the grounds of liberty. Luigi Sturzo was among the ideological drivers behind the idea of regional authorities. The others developed the concept of decentralisation and devolution in the Italian context. The following problems and solutions justified the federal solution for the non-federal state to improve Italian governance.

Generally, federalisation can be divided into two processes. Firstly, the micro-process of reform implementation is based on the ideas from the constructive environment of federalism. The political actors choose those ideas and attempt to interpret them into reform proposals. Subsequently, actors try to implement those reforms to the political institutions. Therefore, federalisation is an actor-centred, elite-driven, and politicised process. The actors are involved in political interactions to implement the reform. On the basis of conducted analysis, it can be said that the federal solution usually supplements the other reform proposals to legitimise those ideas from the efficiency dimension.

Secondly, the macro-process of federalisation is based on the critical junctures of institutional development. Such critical moment, occurred in the 2001 Constitutional Amendment, determined the subsequent federalisation development under the framework of cooperative federalism. The Great Reform (ital. *La Grande Riforma*) was also a salient direction of federalisation development, but four out of five attempts to

establish the Great Reform have failed due to different circumstances. Hence, the macro-process is non-linear and usually supplementary to other reforms.

However, the idea of *La Grande Riforma* persists as there are visible demands for more decentralisation from the regions. The crisis caused by COVID-19 pandemic has been the latest external shock for federalisation, which provoked new discussions. The current right-wing government under the leadership of Giorgia Meloni look into the issue of regional differentiation. The so-called Calderoli Bill is under formulation right now, and it has already been accepted by the Italian Senate. The reform's aim is to establish the amendment of the Constitution to clarify art. 116, or the conditions, under which the regions can demand the differentiated autonomy over certain parts of legislation. This reform satisfies the requests of such regions as Veneto, Lombardia and Emilia-Romania, which are demanding more regional autonomy. Concurrently, *Fratelli d'Italia* (Fdi) is interested in enhancing the role of the head of the government, so-called *premierato reform*. Thus, there is a potential for this bill to become a new Grand Reform, similar to the dual federalism of reforms in 1992–1994, 2005 and 2013. Therefore, the macro-process of federalisation is active at the moment, with the potential for new developments in the near future, but the dynamics of these processes will hardly change for the next reform.

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