

The First Two Years of Berlusconi's Fourth Government: Activity and Legislative Performance¹

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Abstract: On 8 May 2010, Silvio Berlusconi's fourth government came to the end of its first two years in office. In this article, we aim to offer an initial analysis of the Government's 'performance' after this period of time, using its legislative activity as the empirical angle of vision, and providing a number of indicators concerning the initiatives and legislative outcomes of the Italian executive during these two years. The volume of legislative proposals produced by the Berlusconi government, and the instruments used to pilot them through Parliament; the topics, issues and policy sectors on which the Cabinet has chosen to focus its legislative activity; the degree of overlap between the Government's legislative proposals and the goals proclaimed in the manifesto presented by the centre-right coalition during the election campaign of 2008; the success rate of Government bills in this first part of the XVI legislative term: these are the main dimensions of analysis on which the various sections of the paper are focused.

Keywords: Berlusconi government, government performance, legislative activity, programme for government

On 8 May 2010, Silvio Berlusconi's fourth government came to the end of its first two years in office. It had exercised full powers for 730 days, a period of time which, in view of the chronic instability that has long been a feature of Italian governments, places Berlusconi IV in fifth place in an imaginary classification of the duration of the executives of the Italian republic.² True, more recently a period of tension and uncertainty – linked to various conflicts within the People of Freedom (Popolo della Libertà, PdL) especially between Berlusconi himself and the president of the Chamber of Deputies, Gianfranco Fini – seems to have begun. Nevertheless the 2010 regional elections confirmed the support won in large parts of the country by the coalition of the centre right (CIRCaP, 2010).

So the political stability of the executive seems unlikely to be called into question at least in the short run. Yet how strong the Government is – how powerful and effective it is in taking decisions and implementing its

policies – are anything but obvious and on the contrary require careful analysis. Even though only two years have passed since the start of the legislature, such an analysis can already provide reasonably robust indicators of the Government's performance. The pages that follow thus provide an updating and closer analysis of what was recently suggested in the pages of this journal (Marangoni 2009a), using a large battery of indicators concerning the initiatives and legislative outcomes of the fourth Berlusconi government.

Legislative activity, therefore, is the empirical angle of vision we shall use to analyse the Government's performance. In particular, the first section focuses on the volume of legislative proposals produced by the current government and on the instruments used to pilot them through Parliament. The topics and issues on which the Government has focussed the greater part of its legislative activity, on the other hand, will be the object of analysis in the second section. The third section offers an initial evaluation of the extent to which the Government's legislation has adhered to the manifesto presented by the centre-right coalition during the election campaign of 2008. In the last section, finally, we look at the parliamentary passage of the Government's legislative proposals, thereby offering a measure of the success of the Government at the end of the first two years of its mandate.

The volume of government legislative proposals

Between 8 May 2008 and 15 April 2010, the Cabinet (Consiglio dei Ministri) adopted and sent to the two chambers of Parliament 186 legislative proposals. In absolute terms, this confirms the trend towards a progressive reduction in the volume of government legislative initiatives that has now been apparent since the start of the so-called Second Republic as a concomitant, among other things, of a gradual increase in regulatory activity and delegated decree-making by Italian governments (Capano and Giuliani, 2001; Zucchini, 2006; Giuliani and Zucchini, 2008).

The trend towards the simplification of legislative activity is however visible in the short run too. In its first two years of office, the second Prodi government had presented to the Chamber and Senate 223 bills. If we exclude from the overall calculation bills to ratify international agreements and treaties, the proposals presented by the fourth Berlusconi government amount to 105 (against the 148 launched by the Cabinet during the two years of the second Prodi government).

Table 1 allows a more detailed analysis of the quantity of legislative proposals introduced by the current government, breaking them down by type of provision. We note, to begin with, that the ratification of international treaties and agreements (which are often important acts, but of limited impact in terms of public-policy actions and decisions) accounted

for a large proportion (over 43 percent) of government proposals in the first two years of activity.

Table 1: Government legislative initiatives during its first two years in office (at 15 April 2010)

Type of initiative	N	%
Ordinary bills	51	27.4
<i>Ordinary</i>	34	18,3
<i>Laws of delegation</i>	11	5,9
<i>Ordinary containing delegations</i>	6	3,2
Ratifications	81	43.5
Decree laws	54	29.0
Total	186	100

Source: CIRCaP, 2010

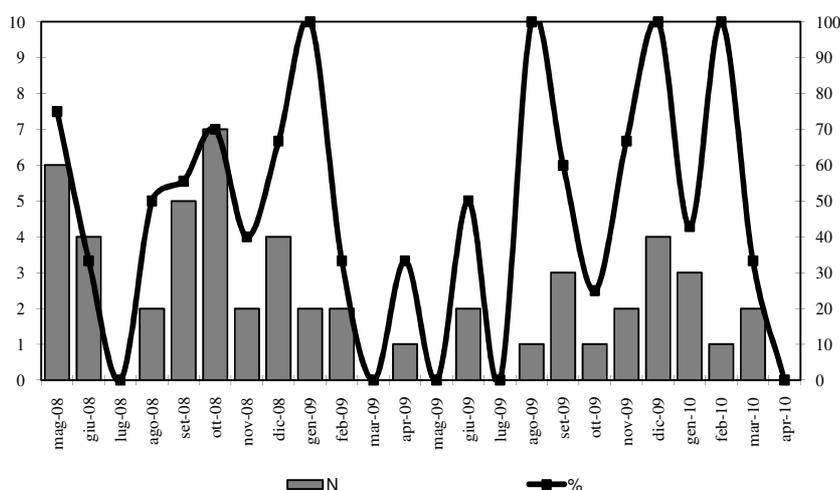
The 51 ordinary bills (excluding ratifications) issued by the Cabinet, constitute little more than 27 percent of the overall total of legislative proposals presented by the executive. Of these, 17 (equal to 33.3 percent) are proposed laws of delegation (11) or proposed ordinary laws containing provisions delegating some matters to the Government (6). Requests for delegated powers thus confirm the status of this instrument as one that is frequently used by the Italian Government (Zucchini 2006).

But the legislative activity of the fourth Berlusconi government is characterised, more than anything, by the space occupied by emergency decree laws. 29 percent of the 186 items of proposed legislation sent to Parliament concern the conversion into ordinary law of decree laws passed by the Cabinet (amounting to 54 in the two years of government). The relative weight of decree laws rises to 51.4 percent (54 decree laws out of 105 legislative proposals) if we leave out of consideration the ratification of international treaties. The corresponding percentage at the end of the two years of the Prodi II government (with 46 decree laws out of 148 legislative proposals excluding the ratification of treaties), was 31.1 percent.

Figure 1 shows the over-time distribution of the decree laws of the fourth Berlusconi government. We note that in absolute terms, the passage of emergency decrees was especially intense during the initial months of government and, as revealed by the annual report of the ministry for the Government's relations with Parliament,³ it fell back overall during the course of 2009. But the contraction in emergency decree-making took place in concomitance with an overall slow-down in government legislative initiatives between January and December 2009 – a slow-down that particularly concerned measures most closely linked to the implementation of government policies (thus again excluding treaty ratifications). Thus, decree laws as a percentage of the overall total of legislative proposals

approved by the Cabinet (excluding ratifications) remained consistently high. In fact the monthly rate of emergency decree-making by the Government, on average around 49 percent during the course of 2008, fell to 33 percent in the first five months of 2009 and rose to 50 percent already in June, before then stabilising at around 58 percent between July and December 2009.

Figure 1: Decree laws approved by the Cabinet on monthly basis: absolute number and as percentage of government bills (at 15 April 2010; ratifications excluded)



Source: CIRCaP (2010)

The actors and topics of government proposals

The great frequency with which the Government has recourse to emergency decree-making has consequences not only for the rate of success of the Government's proposals in Parliament, but also for the ability of the Prime Minister to coordinate, at least formally, the initiatives of the ministers making up the Government. As an indicator of this capacity, we can use the percentage of legislative proposals signed, or co-signed by the head of government - who thereby intervenes directly or at least indirectly in a supervisory capacity, in the drafting of the content. And this cannot but be positively influenced by the systematic recourse to decree laws; for these acts always require the Prime Minister's signature (together with those of the ministers whose remits are most closely related to the specific areas touched on in the decrees).

Table 2 shows that Berlusconi signed, alone (in 3.8 percent of the cases) or together with other ministers of his government (29 percent), 32.8 percent of the legislative measures initiated by the executive. In terms of percentages of proposals, the Prime Minister comes second only to the Foreign Minister – who, however, signs almost nothing other than bills ratifying international treaties and agreements. Excluding the ratification of treaties, the proportion of initiatives that involves the Prime Minister's office rises to as much as 57.1 percent (but in the case of ordinary bills it is about 12 percent).

Table 2: Government bills by type and sponsoring minister (at 15 April 2010)

	Olp	Del	Opd	Rat	DI	Total*	%
International Affairs	0	2	0	81	6	89	47.8
Prime minister	4	1	1	1	54	61	32.8
Justice	8	3	2	13	13	39	21.0
Economy and Finance	11	1	1	1	22	36	19.4
Defence	3	1	0	13	7	24	12.9
Interior	1	1	3	1	10	18	9.7
Leg. simplification	1	3	1	0	3	8	4.3
Agriculture	2	0	0	2	3	7	3.8
Equal opportunities	4	0	0	2	1	7	3.8
Environment	1	0	0	2	4	7	3.8
Economic development	0	1	0	0	5	6	3.2
Public administration	1	2	0	2	1	6	3.2
Employment	1	2	0	1	2	6	3.2
Education	2	0	0	0	4	6	3.2
European affairs	0	2	2	0	1	5	2.7
Institutional reform	1	1	1	0	1	4	2.2
Infrastructure	0	0	0	2	2	4	2.1
Regions	0	1	1	0	1	3	1.6
Culture	1	0	0	2	0	3	1.6
Welfare	1	0	0	1	0	2	1.1
Rel. with Parliament	0	0	0	0	2	2	1.1
Youth Policies	1	0	0	0	0	1	0.5

Source: CIRCaP, 2010

Olp: Ordinary legislative proposals (not providing delegations to government)

DI: Decree laws

Pld: Proposed law of delegation

Opd: Ordinary bills, providing some specific delegations to government

* A bill can be (is often) sponsored by more than one minister.

The rate of involvement of the various ministries in government initiatives can also give us some initial indications of the priorities shown by the

executive's action. It is telling that we find relatively high percentages for the ministry of Justice (which was the signatory or co-signatory of 21 percent of the bills proposed by the Cabinet) and the ministry for the Economy (19.4 percent) followed by Defence (12.9 percent) and the ministry of the Interior (9.7 percent). It is also interesting to note that the department without portfolio with responsibility for legislative simplification entrusted to Roberto Calderoli (co-signatory of 4.3 percent of the proposals) has levels of involvement that are just below those of the most active ministries - providing indirect confirmation of the significance, from a symbolic as well as other points of view, that the objective of simplification has come to assume for the Government's activity.

The areas of public policy that are the objects of proposals - these often being very detailed (and frequently having an omnibus character) - cannot be identified easily or directly from the data. However, a simple indicator can provide us with useful information in this regard. We can in fact calculate the percentage distribution of government proposals across the parliamentary commissions to which they are assigned for first reading: this gives us an idea of the intensity of government intervention in the various areas of public policy identified by the sphere of competence of the permanent commissions of the Chamber and Senate.

An initial figure concerns the measures assigned to commissions acting in a referral (or legislative) capacity: that is the commissions which, on the basis of the prevalent content of the legislative proposals, take responsibility for initiating their parliamentary passage and for carrying out preparatory work for debate on the floor of the chamber (or else carrying out the entire process of analysis, amendment and approval of the bill in cases where the latter is assigned to them in a legislative capacity). As before, we have to keep in mind that a single bill can be assigned to more than one commission, and therefore, the percentages of bills assigned to each of the commissions sum to more than 100. With this methodological qualification established, we note that most of the legislative initiatives of the fourth Berlusconi government (28.6 percent) began their parliamentary passage by being considered by the commission for Constitutional Affairs (exclusively or in tandem with other commissions).

This is a commission that has seen measures concerning mechanisms for the allocation public expenditure assigned to it besides those concerning legislative simplification and issues of public administration. But the Constitutional Affairs commissions of the Chamber and Senate have also dealt with a large number of measures, of a procedural nature (such as the setting up of the ministry of health and the postponement of elections in Aquila) but of limited political significance (for example, amendments to the agreements with the Seventh-day Adventist and the Waldensian Evangelical churches), besides numerous measures extending the scope of existing legislative provisions.

19 percent of the Government's legislative initiatives have turned out to fall within the remit of the Justice commission. These include the bill to reform the penal system, which seems perhaps to be the only wholesale measure concerning judicial procedure and the system of justice (adopted by the Cabinet on 6 February 2009 and still under consideration by the Senate Justice commission). Most of the other government initiatives examined by the Justice commissions in each of the branches of Parliament in fact concern measures having to do with public security and criminality: the law of delegation concerning the fight against the Mafia; measures against acts of persecution and sexual violence; those to combat piracy – in addition to the bill concerning telephone tapping. The commissions for the Budget and Finance have also examined 19 percent of the Government's proposals. They include all the bills concerning the composition, variation and presentation of the state budget, besides a series of 'anti-crisis' measures.

Confirmation that control of the impact of legislation on the state budget and finances has now become a priority and a necessity for the Government and Parliament, comes from the second figure we consider: the percentages of government initiatives assigned to commissions acting in a consultative capacity, that is, commissions which express an opinion about proposals already assigned to commissions acting in a referral capacity but which contain clauses falling within the remits of other commissions. This distribution, then, can give us a more complete picture of how the legislative activity of the fourth Berlusconi government is distributed across the various sectors of public policy.

The Budget and Finance commissions of the Chamber and Senate have been called upon to express an opinion on 70.5 percent of the bills presented by the executive. In contrast, the commission for Constitutional Affairs has intervened in a consultative capacity in the case of 60 percent of them, having often been called upon to express judgements concerning the proposals' constitutionality. It is interesting to note that 47.6 percent of the Government's measures have been subject to judgements made by the commission for European Union Policies – thereby confirming that much national legislation must be coordinated, if not integrated, with the legislation of the EU. Other commissions often called upon to express an opinion on government proposals (thereby indicating some relevance of the proposals for their own areas of public policy) are: the commissions for Employment (with 43.8 percent of the proposals adopted by the Cabinet), Social Affairs and Health (41.9 percent) and Industry (36.2 percent).

Legislative initiatives and the Government's programme

How much of the legislative activity of the executive is driven by the objectives set out in the manifesto presented by the centre-right coalition at

the time of the general election of 2008? And how many of these same objectives have been taken up in government initiatives? Such questions are central to an evaluation of the performance of the Government – the more so in a context such as the one that has recently emerged in Italy where the possibility of alternation in government has progressively changed the model of formation and action of the executive from a transaction to an implementation model. In other words, there has been a change from a mode of government formation centred on negotiations over appointments (on the assumption that policies will be agreed subsequently) to a form of government action centred on implementation of a programme formulated by the winning leader and accepted by the coalition (Verzichelli, 2003).

In Table 3, as we done previously (Marangoni 2009a), we show the percentage of government legislative provisions, broken down by type of initiative, that we have classified as programmatic. These are the initiatives aimed at implementation (in whole or in part) of the commitments made in the programme for government. In making such a classification we made use of the Government's own monitoring, carried out by the ministry for Implementation of the Programme which, for each of the executive's measures, specifies the programmatic 'aim' (*missione*), the programmatic 'objectives' and the specific pledges to which each measure is to be attributed.⁴ We choose to make our classification according to a criterion that is more stringent than the identification of the relevant programmatic aims, considering as programmatic only those initiatives for which not only a generic aim can be identified, but also a more immediate programmatic objective.

On the basis of such a classification, and not including bills of ratification, 45.7 percent of the initiatives approved by the Cabinet and sent to the Chamber and Senate turn out to be attributable to government programme objectives. Table 3 also shows that such initiatives have often been carried through decree laws, or together with requests for delegated powers on the part of the executive.

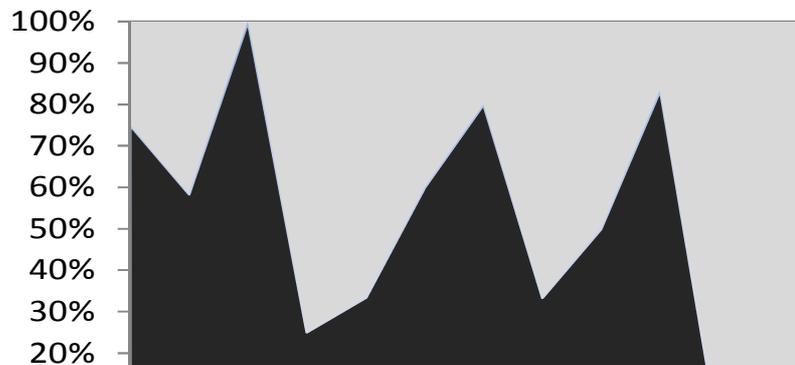
Table 3: Government programmatic bills by type of initiative (at 15 April 2010; ratifications excluded)

Type of initiative	N	%
Ordinary bills	20	39.2
<i>Ordinary</i>	12	35,3
<i>Delegations</i>	5	45,5
<i>Ordinary providing delegations</i>	3	50,0
Decree laws	28	51.9
Total	48	45.7

Source: CIRCaP, 2010

More generally we note that there has been a progressive slow-down in the programmatic activity of the government as compared to the first year of its mandate which had ended with a proportion of measures of a programmatic nature amounting to 52.2 percent.⁵ A slow-down in programmatic activity (Figure 2) can in part be caused by factors that are, so to speak, physiological, that is, linked to waning of the 'honeymoon effect' of the initial months of government, or to the unexpected occurrence of periods of difficulty for the coalition. In particular, the spring (and in part the autumn) of 2009, and the last three months (February - April 2010), have been periods in which relations between the various components of the governing team have turned out to be unusually conflictual.⁶

Figure 2: Percentage of programmatic and non-programmatic bills, on a monthly basis (at 15 April 2010; ratifications excluded)



Source: CIRCaP, 2010

Table 4 shows in more detail the contours of the executive's programmatic activity, by presenting the percentage of initiatives associated with each of the objectives of the seven aims of the government programme. Here, a single legislative initiative is associated with a specific programmatic objective (first column of the table) when for at least one of the articles (or paragraphs) that compose it the link with the objective in question is identifiable. As before, the same programmatic initiative can be associated with more than one objective.

From Table 4 we discover that most of the programmatic measures adopted by the Government in the first two years have been associated with the objectives 'A better justice system' (25 percent of the programmatic initiatives); 'More security' (20.8 percent); 'Reorganisation and digitalisation of the Public Administration' (20.8 percent), and 'Infrastructure and Telecommunications' (20.8 percent). The lowest percentages of programmatic initiatives by contrast have been those concerning the objectives associated with the aim, 'The South', and

especially the objectives, 'Target legislation for the South', 'Development of southern industries', 'Combating crime in the South', which saw the approval of no specific initiative by the Government.⁷

*Table 4: Government programmatic bills by type of initiative and programmatic pledge (at 15 April 2010; ratifications excluded) **

Objective	Olp	Dele	DI	Opd	Total	%A	%B
New tax regime for firms	1	-	5	-	6	5.7	12.5
Infrastructure	1	-	8	1	10	9.5	20.8
Employment	2	-	3	-	5	4.8	10.4
Liberalisation	-	-	4	-	4	3.8	8.3
Supporting exports	2	-	4	-	6	5.7	12.5
Reorganising public adm.	2	2	5	1	10	9.5	20.8
Lower taxes	2	-	7	-	9	8.6	18.8
A house for everyone	2	-	5	-	7	6.7	14.6
Better social services	2	-	2	-	4	3.8	8.3
A future for the young	-	-	1	-	1	1.0	2.1
More security	3	1	5	1	10	9.5	20.8
More justice	4	1	5	2	12	11.4	25.0
Health	1	-	1	1	3	2.9	6.3
Schools, universities, research	3	-	4	-	7	6.7	14.6
Environment	2	-	-	1	3	2.9	6.3
South: infrastructure	-	-	3	-	3	2.9	6.3
South: target legislation	-	-	-	-	-	0.0	0.0
South: industrial development	-	-	-	-	-	0.0	0.0
South: compensatory tax regime	1	-	1	-	2	1.9	4.2
South: combating crime	-	-	-	-	-	0.0	0.0
Federalism: local institutions	-	1	1	-	2	1.9	4.2
Federalism: local finance	-	1	3	-	4	3.8	8.3
Public finance	1	-	1	-	2	1.9	4.2

Source: CIRCaP, 2010

Olp: Ordinary legislative proposals (not providing delegations to government)

Dele: Delegations

DI: Decree laws

Opd: Ordinary bills, providing some specific delegations to government

%A: Percentage of overall bills

%B: Percentage of programmatic bills

*A bill can refer to more than one programmatic pledge.

Table 5 completes our analysis of the link between legislative initiative and government programme by showing how many of the pledges mentioned in the programme document have been the object of (legislative) provisions on the part of the executive. For each aim in the programme, therefore, the table shows the overall number of pledges mentioned, and the number (and percentage) of pledges with which it is possible to associate at least one government initiative, or, more precisely, at least one article (or one paragraph) of a bill presented by the Cabinet (bills of ratification excluded). In total, the centre right's 2008 manifesto mentioned 126 specific pledges. 49 of these (equal to 38.8 percent) appear so far to have been reflected in legislative initiatives of the executive, with percentages differing significantly as between the various aims: it is enough to compare, for example, the 75 and the 22.2 percent for the pledges associated with the aims, 'Federalism' and 'the South' respectively.

Table 5: Percentage of programmatic pledges on which the Government took at least one legislative action, by general programmatic 'aim' (at 15 April 2010; ratifications excluded)

General aim	N. of programmatic pledges	N. of pledges covered by government bills (%)
Re-launching expansion	32	15 (46.9)
More security, better justice	34	7 (20.6)
Public services	26	15 (57.7)
Supporting the family	20	6 (30.0)
The South	9	2 (22.2)
Federalism	4	3 (75.0)
Public Finance	1	1 (100)
Total	126	49 (38.8)

Source: CIRCaP (2010)

It goes without saying that such analysis is far from being a measure of how much of the substance of each aim contained in the government programme has already been implemented by the executive. Though we can draw some useful indications from it, here, as above, we can establish only how many of the individual legislative provisions of the government have some link with specific programmatic commitments. We are obliged to suspend any judgment concerning the scope and especially the effectiveness (in terms of meeting programme objectives) of these same provisions.

The success of the government in Parliament

Having analysed some important characteristics of the proposals of the fourth Berlusconi government, we now ask how many of them have become law at the end of the first two years of the legislature. Table 6, which provides data concerning the success of government bills broken down by type of measure, presents a rather significant figure: almost 76 percent of the legislative proposals advanced by the Cabinet have already been definitively approved by Parliament. This is a particularly high rate of success: the second Prodi government had come to the end of its life, after two years, having had a success rate for its proposals of about 49 percent. At the end of its first two years, the second Berlusconi government had had a success rate of 59 percent.

The Government's success rate remains essentially the same (75.2 percent) if we leave out of consideration the ratification of international agreements. As we had occasion to emphasise in our report of last year it is, naturally, related to the executive's strategy of entrusting much of its legislative activity to the process of emergency decree-making. Decrees, by their very nature, are subject to a process of parliamentary approval that is rather rapid. They take about a third of the time required on average by bills not concerning the conversion of emergency decrees (ratifications excluded). These are considered by the two branches of Parliament for an average of 163 days before being approved. Particularly lengthy is the average time required for the approval of laws of delegation (245 days) and ordinary laws containing powers delegated to the Government (327 days). More rapid is the process required to pass the legislation ratifying international agreements, amounting, as it does, to 97 days on average.

Table 6: Government bills: approval rate, average number of readings, and average duration of parliamentary scrutiny (at 15 April 2010; ratifications excluded)

	Approved	%	Readings (average)	Average duration of parliamentary scrutiny (days)
Ordinary bills	27	52.9	2.5	162.6
<i>Ordinary</i>	20	58.8	2.2	121,4
<i>Delegations</i>	4	36.4	3	245
<i>Ordinary providing delegations</i>	3	50.0	3	327,3
Ratifications	62	76.5	2.0	96.7
Decree laws	52	96.3	2.2	56.2
Total	141	75.8	2.2	94.4

Source: CIRCaP (2010)

Finally, data concerning amendments to government proposals indicate that the Italian parliament continues to have a significant impact on the substance of the executive's provisions. Each of the 79 government bills approved (international treaty ratifications are excluded), saw the commissions and the two branches of Parliament debate and vote on an average of more than 722 amendments (of which 42, on average, were approved).⁸ Of these, 678 carry the signatures of deputies and senators belonging to the opposition and the majority. But often, the sponsor of amendments (1,341 on average of which 7 voted on and approved)⁹ is the Government, which in this way intervenes directly in the process of modification of its proposals, 'defending' their content and often 'sanitising' changes by means of amendments which substitute, in whole or in part, the articles making up the proposals being considered by the Chamber and Senate. The Government often makes approval of such amendments a matter of confidence in it.

The use of confidence motions

At the end of the first two years of the legislature, Parliament had voted 28 times on motions of confidence which the fourth Berlusconi government had attached to the approval of its proposals. The Government had used confidence motions more frequently in the Chamber of Deputies (19 times) than in the Senate (9 times). A further two confidence motions had been attached by the executive (in the Senate) to the approval of a bill originating from the 'back benches', containing provisions about impediments to the presence of defendants in judicial hearings. Overall, then, requests for votes of confidence affected about 23 percent of the government proposals that became law (excluding bills to ratify treaties).

Both in absolute and in relative terms, the fourth Berlusconi government's recourse to confidence votes is not very dissimilar to that of the second Prodi government in the two years of the XV legislature. At the end of its mandate it had tabled 26 confidence motions in relation to 13 legislative provisions considered by the Chamber and Senate (therefore about 18 percent of the government proposals approved by Parliament in two years). It may seem surprising that two governments so different in terms of the sizes of their majorities (extremely narrow in the case of Prodi II) and the fragmentation of the coalitions supporting them, should be so similar in terms of the number of times they have recourse to confidence votes. However, the confidence motion has by now become less an 'extreme' measure used by governments to protect and consolidate their majorities, than an instrument used strategically to guide debate and limit the time required for approval of the bills they send to Parliament. It is therefore almost an element of 'forced' rationalisation of the legislative process that seems to be used to the greatest extent precisely by those

governments which, in virtue of the (at least numerical) solidity of the majorities supporting them, can allow themselves to 'force' the ordinary process of decision-making in Parliament.

If we then look at the issues the Government has most frequently made matters of confidence, we find that as many as 20 of the 28 confidence motions voted by Parliament in relation to government proposals concerned the approval of decree laws. In the second place, on as many as nine occasions, confidence motions were attached to government amendments – amendments which entirely replaced the single article of the bill converting into law the emergency decree. Finally, confidence motions were attached by the Government on four occasions to amendments through which it sought to substitute, wholly or in part, the text of bills being considered by the Chamber and Senate.

Conclusion

In this article we have sought to provide a series of items of empirical evidence about the characteristics of the legislative activity of the fourth Berlusconi government during the first two years of its term of office. This is a period of time sufficiently long (as mentioned, it is longer than the time in office of most governments of the Italian republic), to have enabled us to discern the dynamics of the Government's activity, dynamics that now seem well established.

The Government seems capable of achieving considerable success in Parliament given that it has obtained approval for a large majority of its legislative measures. The measures are in many cases concerned with implementing the Government's programme, which thus seems to be an important point of reference for its activity. However, certain important programmatic objectives put before voters in 2008 appear to have been down-sized or postponed: the Government has done a great deal in the areas of justice, security and budget stability, but much less in other areas of public policy (such as regeneration of the South or support for families).

More generally, the Government's success in seeing its initiatives transformed into law come at a (seemingly inevitable) price in the frequent recourse to instruments (especially emergency decrees and confidence motions) with the capacity to force and constrain the process of parliamentary approval. This suggests that the cohesion and discipline of the parliamentary groups can probably not be relied upon. The way in which the Government deals with divisions in Parliament reinforces its image of strength and decisiveness. However, the frequent use of motions of confidence as instruments to reduce the time required for passage of a decree or a bill draws attention to the continuing need for checks and balances in legislative activity. Making a decree law an issue of confidence for example, allows the rapid armour-plating of provisions which are often

amended by the Government itself after certain critical changes introduced by the parties or individual parliamentarians, changes which oblige the executive to embark on changes of direction and to revisit the original texts.

Translated by James L. Newell

Notes

1. An earlier version of this article was published in the "V Report on the Government in Italy", edited by the Centre for the study of political change (CIRCaP), at the University of Siena. the report, in Italian, is available at www.gips.unisi.it/circap/publications/government-report [accessed 15 June 2010].

2. Behind two important governments of the First Republic (Moro III, which was in office for 816 days between 1966 and 1968, and Craxi I, in office for 1,088 days between 1983 and 1986), and two more recent governments: the second of the governments led by Berlusconi himself between 2001 and 2005 (1,409 days), and the first Prodi government (in office for 874 days between 1996 and 1998).

3. See www.governo.it/rapportiparlamento/salastampa/dossier/attivita2009_governo_berlusconi.pdf [accessed 15 June 2010].

4. The government programme identifies seven "aims for the future of Italy" each of which provides for a series of objectives and for each of these, a list of specific pledges. For details of the structure and organisation of the programme see De Giorgi and Marangoni (2009) and Marangoni (2009b).

5. While the proportion for the second year of government is 33.3 percent.

6. On internal government conflict see the relevant chapter in the 2010 CIRCaP report, especially pp. 9-10.

7. Although some initiatives relating to other objectives will obviously have an impact on these ones too. This is the case, for example, with the proposed law of delegation concerning the fight against the Mafia, associated with the objective, 'A better system of justice'.

8. Such averages are influenced by the 'extreme values', that is by proposals (especially those concerning the Budget) that have attracted a particularly large number of proposed amendments. A robust estimate (that is, one that gives greater weight to values closer to the centre of the distribution) gives a total of 381 proposed amendments of which 19 were approved.

9. It is likely that others were entrusted to parliamentary rapporteurs acting in agreement with the executive and who on average presented over 19 amendments of which about 9 were approved.

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