

## **Technocrats in Government: The Composition and Legislative Initiatives of the Monti Government Eight Months into its Term of Office**

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*Abstract: The crisis of the fourth Berlusconi government opened the way to the formation of a new executive led by Mario Monti: an executive of technocrats called upon to deal with the situation of real emergency in which Italy found itself thanks to the international economic and financial crisis more generally. The Government is one that could be defined as a substitute, temporarily assuming the responsibilities of parties that find themselves in a state of obvious weakness. It is a transition government, holding office until such time as the parties are once more able to assume their governing responsibilities first hand. If it is still too early to form a sensible judgement of the new Government's performance, we can, however, analyse some preliminary data concerning its legislative activity. We do so by utilizing the usual battery of indicators by means of which we have monitored the Government's parliamentary activity in past issues of this journal (so as to provide data that can be used for diachronic analyses). Naturally, given the specific nature of the executive presided over by Monti, our analysis cannot do without a preliminary examination of the characteristics of the new government's composition and structure.*

*Keywords: Monti government, technical cabinet, lawmaking, executive performance*

The new executive led by Mario Monti took office on 16 November 2011, four days after Silvio Berlusconi resigned as Prime Minister. It was the sixty-first government of the Italian Republic; the second government of the sixteenth legislature; a government with a 'national obligation' as Monti himself put it during the course of the speech in which he outlined his government's programme to Parliament. It was a government that took office in order to deal with a situation of obvious economic and financial emergency: a technocratic government, staffed by people from outside the world of politics. In this sense the executive headed by Monti can be defined as an 'interim government' (Cotta and Verzichelli, 2012), to which

political parties unable for various reasons to form a governing majority, have delegated some of their power until such time as they will be again able to assume their responsibilities directly.

Our usual survey of the Government's activity cannot, obviously, overlook this changed context meaning that we cannot do without an, at least brief, analysis of the characteristics and the structure of the new government. This takes up the first part of this article. Looking at the Government's legislative activity more directly, it is essential to analyse the strategies it adopted in seeking to govern through Parliament. This is the focus in the second part of the article.

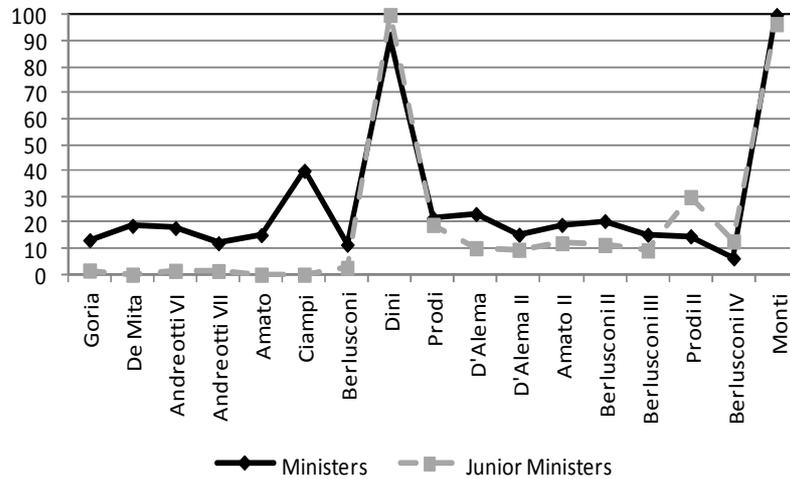
### **The Government: size, structure and personnel**

Looking at its composition, we see that all members of the Monti government can be defined as outsiders (De Winter, 1991; Fabbrini, 2000): that is, they have never been members of Parliament, and neither were they spokespersons for any of the political parties when they were appointed as ministers. The same is true, with only two exceptions,<sup>1</sup> of the team of junior ministers and ministers' deputies.

The executive led by Monti, then, closely approximates the model of a pure technocratic government, the only other government to have done so in the last twenty-five years (in terms of the percentage of ministers and junior ministers drawn from outside Parliament) being the Dini government (from January 1995 to May 1996). The Dini government too, in fact, was composed of ministers and junior ministers that were not members of Parliament at the time of their nomination, almost all (about 97 percent) of them having not had any previous parliamentary experience (Figure 1).

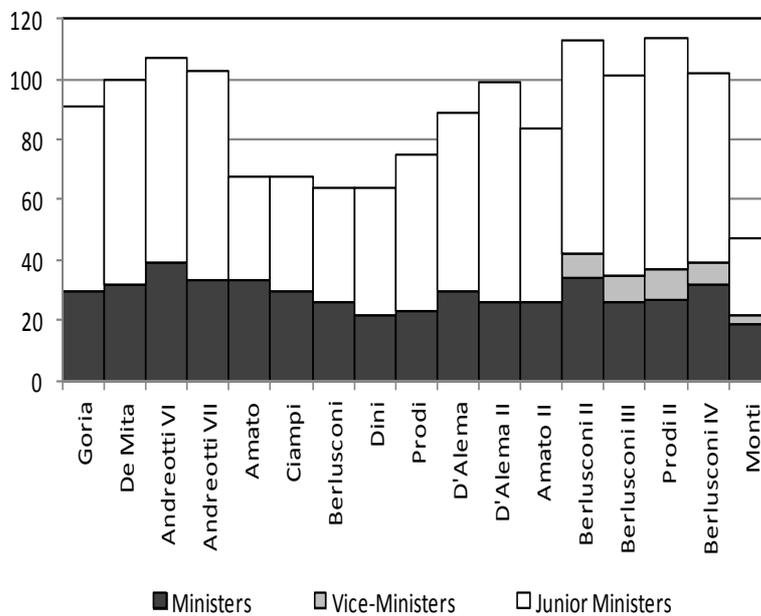
Looking more closely at the backgrounds of the ministerial team chosen by Monti one is struck by the predominance of senior public or semi-public administrators and of experts (typically university professors) who, in most cases, took on ministerial responsibilities that reflected their specific areas of competence (Cotta and Verzichelli, 2012). More specifically, Monti's executive provided places for two private sector or semi-private sector managers (Gnudi, Passera); eight university professors (Balduzzi, Fornero, Giarda, Monti, Profumo, Ornaghi, Riccardi, Severino); eight *grand commis* (Barca, Catania, Moavero Milanese, Patroni Griffi, Di Paola, Cancellieri, Terzi, Clini). It thus consisted of 18 ministers.<sup>2</sup> The junior ministers appointed at the start of the Government's mandate came to 25; ministers' deputies came to 3. Overall, then, the Government had 46 members. This was a decidedly lower number, as can be seen from Figure 2 (which shows the number of members of Italian governments over the last 25 years), as compared to the corresponding numbers for previous executives.

**Figure 1: Percentage of ministers and junior ministers in Italian governments without any parliamentary experience at the time of their appointment: 1987-2011**



Source: CIRCaP, University of Siena

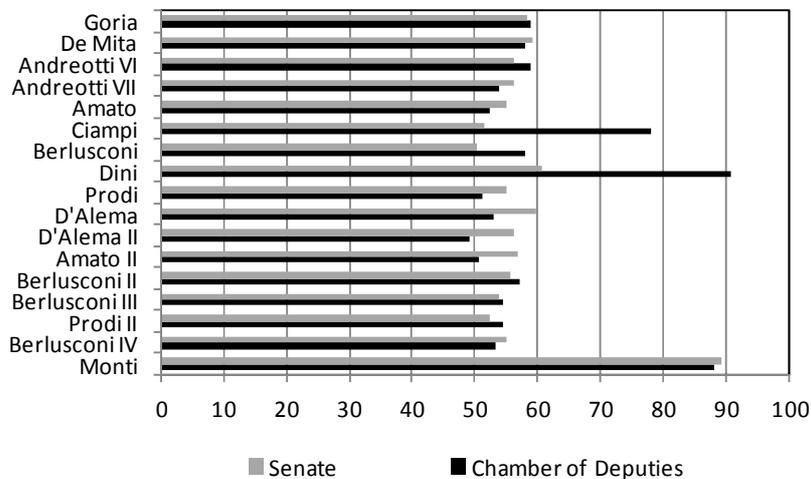
**Figure 2: Size of governments (ministers, ministers' deputies and junior ministers): 1987-2011**



Source: CIRCaP, University of Siena

Exceptional too is the size (as well as the composition) of the parliamentary coalition supporting the Monti government. As is well known, in fact, the executive enjoys the support of the two largest groups in Parliament, the Popolo della Libertà and the Partito Democratico, besides the support of most of the other groups, with the exception of the Lega Nord and Italia dei Valori, which had however voted in favour of the confidence motion giving life to the Government. Consequently, those voting in favour of the new executive came to 556 in the Chamber (equal to 88 percent of the membership) and 281 (over 89 percent of the membership) in the Senate. These were record numbers as can be seen clearly in Figure 3 which shows the votes in favour of new Italian governments, as percentages of the total memberships of the Chamber and the Senate, starting from the tenth legislature.<sup>3</sup> The percentages supporting the Monti government were larger by far than those supporting the preceding governments, whether these were party governments, or the technocratic or semi-technocratic governments of the period from 1994 to 1996.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 3: Percentages of members of the Senate and Chamber of Deputies supporting new governments in inaugural motions of confidence 1987-2011<sup>a</sup>**



Note: <sup>a</sup> The percentages for the Chamber of Deputies also include abstentions

Source: CIRCaP, University of Siena

In the following sections we shift our attention from the structure of the Government to its activity. We therefore use the same battery of indicators already used to analyse the (legislative) activity of the preceding governments.<sup>5</sup> Besides providing us with useful information concerning the

legislative capacity of the Monti government eight months from the start of its term of office, this will also allow us to undertake some initial interesting comparisons between the activity of the current government and that of the governments preceding it in the course of the most recent legislatures. We start with the ability of the Government to set an agenda consisting of its own programmatic priorities.

### **The Government's programme**

The Monti government, it has been said, is an emergency government, one that took office with the specific task of managing and seeking to withstand the period of acute economic and financial crisis facing the country, and of finding a way of bringing down the colossal size of the public debt. Moreover, it was a government that was formed in the knowledge that the term of office head of it amounted at most to little more than a year and a half. The Government's agenda could not, therefore but be heavily conditioned by its purposes and its time horizon.

During the course of the speech outlining his programme to Parliament at the start of the debate on the confidence vote inaugurating his government, Monti identified the two primary objectives of his executive as: dealing with the emergency by assuring the sustainability of public finances, and implementing a plan for modernisation and growth. The Prime Minister then outlined the main strategies he had in mind for achieving these objectives: improvement in the public finances; implementation of the commitments given to the EU; reduction in the costs of maintaining elected bodies; rationalisation of the public administration; reform of welfare legislation; the fight against tax evasion; the taxation of property; the selling off of publicly-owned real estate; macro-economic policies to encourage growth; intervention in the labour market; micro-economic policies to encourage growth.

Naturally, it is not our intention here to enter into the merits or the appropriateness of such public policy objectives. We are, rather, interested in gauging the actual capacity of the executive to set for Parliament an agenda consisting of its own priorities – a capacity that could not be taken for granted (given the extreme heterogeneity of the coalition upon which the Government relied) but absolutely crucial (given the situation of urgency in which the government of technocrats was called upon to operate).

With this in mind, drawing upon a framework of analysis widely referred to in the literature (Royed, 1996; Moury and Timmermans, 2008; Moury, 2012) we will examine the Prime Minister's programmatic statement, breaking the text down into single items (grammatically complete sentences) and identifying those that emerge as concrete objectives to be reached (for example: 'proceed to amalgamate the agencies

of social security'), distinguishing them from those having a symbolic nature (for example 'the fight against crime') and those useful for developing themes of a general character (for example: 'Europe is living through a more difficult period than any it has gone through since the war').<sup>6</sup> Textual analysis of Monti's programmatic statement thus returns 27 items classifiable as concrete commitments. Table 1 shows how they are distributed (absolutely and in percentage terms) among the ten policy areas listed above.

The objective of rationalising the public administration is the most detailed one (having 5 commitments, amounting to over 18 percent of those set out), while the reform of welfare legislation (which was nevertheless to be one of the first and most important acts of the government) is the subject only of a generic reference, in the Prime Minister's statement, to the shortcomings and the inequality (in intergenerational terms) of the Italian pensions system. The reference is not one that appears like a straightforward programmatic commitment (at least according to our definition) however much it presaged the course of action the Government was shortly to take in the area of pensions.

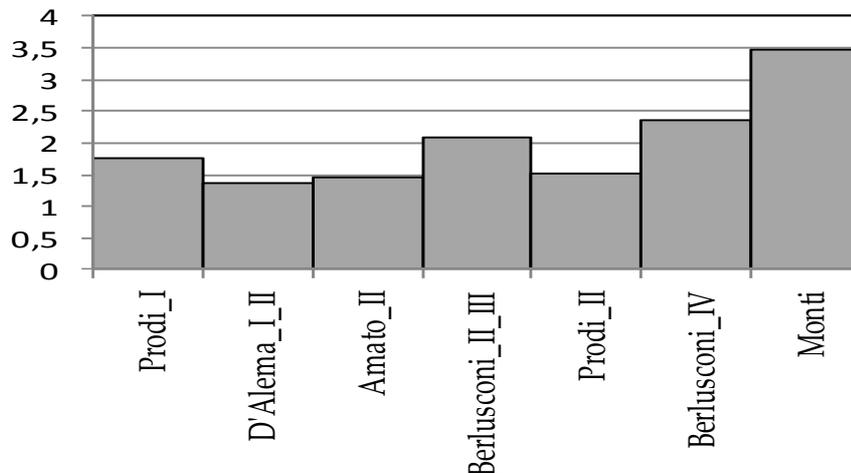
Aside from its substance, comparison of Monti's programmatic statement with those of the prime ministers that preceded him shows that at least relatively, the current Prime Minister was better able to identify a series of objectives to be reached and to focus his inaugural speech in the Chamber and the Senate upon them. And in all probability this was due not to the existence of a more wide-ranging agreement among the various components of the governing coalition but rather to the greater room for manoeuvre Monti at least initially enjoyed with respect to the parties and their interlocking vetoes in his capacity as a technocratic prime minister called upon to deal with an emergency. Figure 4 therefore shows the 'programmatic density' of the inaugural speeches of Italian prime ministers in the course of the last four legislatures (beginning with the thirteenth). This we calculate, for the programmatic statements of each government, as the number of specific commitments identifiable for every 500 words.<sup>7</sup>

Programmatic density is equal to about 3.5 in the case of the Monti government: very much above the corresponding figures for the preceding governments. The point of comparison closest in time is the figure for the fourth Berlusconi government which does not rise above 2.37. Significantly lower is the index of programmatic density for the other governments that took office during the course of a legislature following the resignation of a previous executive: those led by D'Alema (October 1998 – April 2000)<sup>8</sup> and Amato (April 2000 – June 2001): in both cases equal to about 1.4.

**Table 1: Government's programmatic pledges by areas of intervention**

Area of intervention area	N. of pledges	real %
Improvement in the public finances	2	7.41
Implementation of the commitments given to the EU	2	7.41
Reduction in the costs of maintaining elected bodies	2	7.41
Rationalisation of the public administration	5	18.52
Reform of welfare legislation	0	0.00
The fight against tax evasion	2	7.41
The taxation of property	1	3.70
The selling off of publicly-owned real estate	2	7.41
Macro-economic policies to encourage growth	3	11.11
Intervention in the labour market	4	14.81
Micro-economic policies to encourage growth	4	14.81
Total	27	100.00

Source: CIRCaP, University of Siena

**Figure 4: "Programmatic density" of Italian PMs' inaugural speeches: 1996-2011**

Source: CIRCaP, University of Siena

### The Government's legislative activity

As usual, having discussed the composition of the Government and its programme, we now shift our attention to the executive's legislative initiatives during the first eight months of its term. It is worth repeating: here we are not concerned with the substance of the Government's

legislative decisions, a matter that will have to be left to much more detailed analyses by students of public policy. Rather, we will focus on the quantity and the 'quality' of the measures introduced by the Cabinet in the Chamber and Senate; the procedures used by the Government in order to steer its initiatives through Parliament, and measures of the success of the initiatives in obtaining parliamentary approval.<sup>9</sup> The analysis covers the period up until the end of June 2012. We begin with the number of legislative initiatives taken by the executive, which we can see in Table 2.

**Table 2: Bills passed by the Cabinet**

Type of bill	N	% of total bills
Bills	17	23.6
<i>Ordinary bills</i>	10	13.9
<i>Proposed laws of delegation</i>	6	8.3
<i>Bills including proposals for delegation</i>	1	1.4
Treaty ratifications	31	43.1
Decree laws	24	33.3
Total	72	100

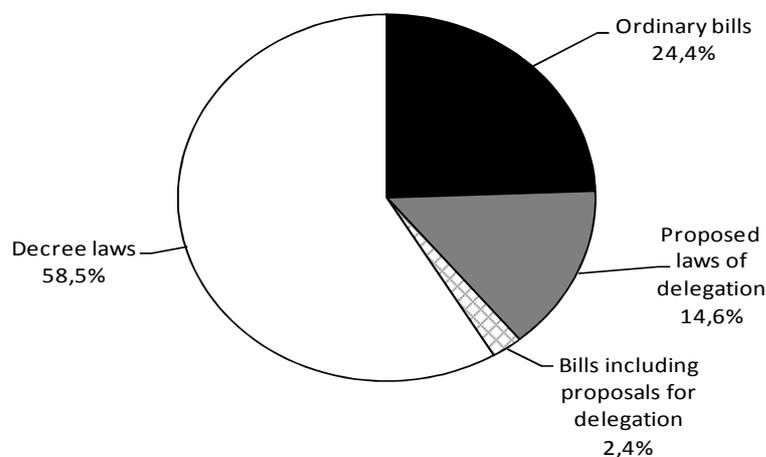
Source: CIRCaP (as at 28 June 2012)

During the course of the 36 meetings held between 16 November 2011 and 28 June 2012, the Cabinet approved and sent to Parliament a total of 72 bills. It can be seen that emergency decree-making constituted a significant portion of the total, accounting for over 33 percent of the bills sponsored by the Government. The largest proportion (accounting for more than 43 percent), however, is accounted for by the 31 bills ratifying international treaties and agreements. These are often little more than formal acts, perhaps significant in some cases, but generally without much immediate impact in terms of public policies. They are therefore ones that we exclude from the subsequent analysis. Thus, leaving treaty ratifications to one side, as we can see from Figure 5, emergency decrees as a proportion of the remaining 41 initiatives rise to 58.5 percent.

An 'emergency' government, one that took office to deal quickly with problems regarded by many (not least the European institutions) as pressing, the executive headed by Monti showed a marked tendency to seek to pilot its initiatives through Parliament by means of emergency measures such as decree laws. It is difficult to tell however to what extent this represents an anomaly with respect to the strategies traditionally adopted by governments. Indeed, it is sufficient to note, again taking a point of reference close in time, that emergency decrees as a percentage of the total number of initiatives (excluding treaty ratifications) of the fourth

Berlusconi government at the end of the first eight months of its term came to more than 54 percent.<sup>10</sup> About 24 percent of the initiatives of the Monti government (excluding treaty ratifications) consists of ordinary law proposals. Six (accounting for 14.6 percent) are proposed laws of delegation to which must be added one bill containing clauses delegating the regulation of certain matters to the passage of government directives.

*Figure 5: Percentage distribution of the Government's legislative initiatives by type of measure (excluding treaty ratifications)*



Source: CIRCaP (as at 28 July 2012)

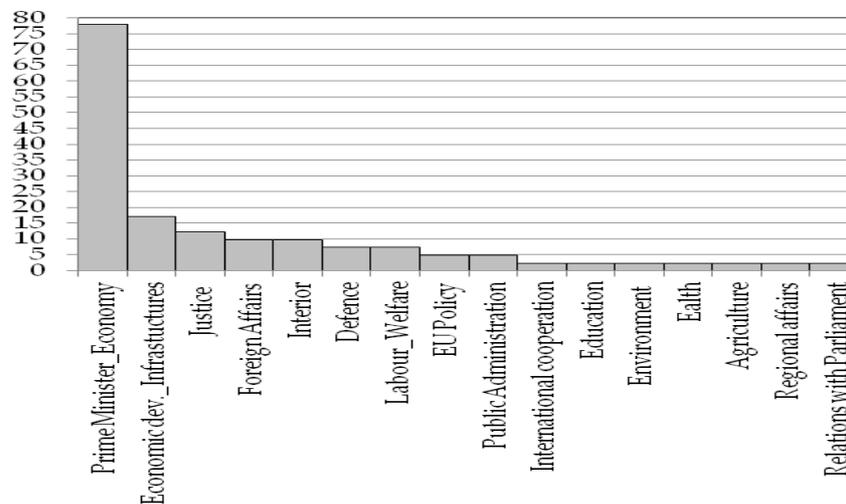
### **The authors of government initiatives**

The predominance of emergency decrees indicates that the law-making style pursued by the Monti government has been one strongly coordinated from the centre of the executive. In the Italian legal system, in fact, emergency decrees must always carry the signature of the Prime Minister. This means, given the large number of decrees presented, that the various departments of the Prime Minister's office have, at least formally, contributed to the drafting of a large proportion of the measures adopted by the Government. If we then take account of the fact that Monti himself is not only Prime Minister but also has the responsibilities of the crucial minister for the Economy, it transpires that the current chief executive been responsible for initiating (alone or together with other ministers) no fewer than 78 percent of the bills presented by the Cabinet to Parliament (excluding treaty ratifications).

Figure 6 completes the picture by showing the percentage of government proposals signed or co-signed by each minister. Aside from

the Prime Minister, whose signature as we have seen appears on most of the initiatives sponsored by the Government, relatively high levels of involvement are recorded for the minister for Economic Development and Infrastructure (17.1 percent), and for the minister of Justice (12.2 percent). The ministers for Foreign Affairs and the Interior have a slightly lower proportion, at 10 percent. The ministers of Defence and of Labour both sign just over 7 percent of the Government's proposals. The other ministers are on proportions below 5 percent.

*Figure 6: Percentage of bills sponsored (or co-sponsored) by each ministry ratifications excluded*



Source: CIRCaP (as at 28 June 2012)

### **Legislative initiatives and the Government's programme**

Thus far we have measured the number of government initiatives. We have considered their authors and the procedures the Government has chosen to adopt in presenting them to Parliament. We can now pose a different question: What kinds of initiative has the Government been able to take?

As we have repeatedly mentioned, we are not concerned to analyse or judge the merits of each of the Government's legislative measures. Rather, independently of their substantive quality, our aim is to explore the relationship between the initiatives actually taken by the executive, on the one hand, and the Government's programme, discussed above, on the other. As usual, then, the indicator we use is the programmatic nature of the Government's legislative proposals. That is, we classify as programmatic such legislative initiatives of the executive as those designed

to give effect (wholly or in part) to public-policy objectives contained in the programmatic statement of the Government (or rather of the Prime Minister).

It is worth being precise and dwelling on this point. Operationally, what we do is to compare, in terms of key words, the titles of government proposals (besides the actual text in cases where the title is less than clear or is unrevealing) and the substance of the programmatic statement made by the Prime Minister to Parliament. For each government initiative, therefore, we are able to reveal the existence, or otherwise, of a connection with at least one of the commitments and (actual) objectives which analysis of the statements themselves has allowed us to identify.<sup>11</sup> From Table 3 we can see that, excluding ratifications, about 44 percent of the initiatives taken by the Monti government have been programmatic in nature.

**Table 3: Percentage of government legislative initiatives linked to programmatic objectives (excluding treaty ratifications)**

Type of initiative	N	%
Bills	6	35.3
<i>Ordinary bills</i>	3	30.0
<i>Proposed laws of delegation</i>	2	33.3
<i>Bills including proposals for delegation</i>	1	100
Decree laws	12	50
Total	18	43,9

Source: CIRCAP, University of Siena

Disaggregated by type of initiative the data then reveal that decree laws and proposed laws of delegation (at 50 and 33 percent respectively) have more often been of a programmatic nature than have ordinary bills (at 30 percent). Overall, about 78 percent of the 18 initiatives we have classified as programmatic are made up of urgent measures or measures delegating powers to the Government. The percentage rises to over 83 if we include among the ‘extraordinary’ measures the further bill containing clauses delegating the regulation of certain matters to the passage of government directives.

We thus find confirmation of the view that, with very little time available, and forced to rely on a majority that was certainly large but anything but homogeneous, the executive led by Monti wanted to ‘centralise’ legislative decision-making (the timing and the substance of which it attempted to regiment through the use of emergency decrees and proposals for the delegation of powers to the Government) – especially decision-making on the most important measures and those associated with the programmatic objectives it had set itself.

### Rates of success of government proposals in Parliament

How many of the Government's proposals had, then, become law at the end of the first eight months of the Government's term? The percentage is not large and not as large as one might have expected given the nature of the Government and the need, recognised in many quarters, for it to 'act effectively and to act quickly'. The rate of success has certainly been affected by the large number of emergency decrees still in the process of being converted into ordinary law as we write, and which, however, suggests that the Government has had some difficulties in overcoming (in a small amount of time) the resistance (if not the interlocking vetoes) of a heterogeneous parliamentary majority.

*Table 4: Rate of success of government initiatives by type of initiative ratifications excluded*

Type of initiative	N	%
Bills	2	11.8
<i>Ordinary bills</i>	1	10.0
<i>Proposed laws of delegation</i>	0	0
<i>Bills including proposals for delegation</i>	1	100
Decree laws	12	50
Total	14	34.1

Source: CIRCaP (as at 28 July 2012)

It is not very surprising, then, that the executive often made parliamentary approval of its proposals matters of confidence, especially those which (at least in the Government's view) were the most urgent and important. In fact nine of the Monti government's initiatives were made questions of confidence. But the confidence votes demanded by the Government in connection with these nine measures amounted to fully 23<sup>12</sup> – revealing that the executive wanted to oversee (and to minimise the length of) the process of approval of certain initiatives by having recourse to votes of confidence at every turn in both chambers of Parliament.<sup>13</sup>

### Concluding remarks

Technocrats have once again been called upon to deal with a situation of grave economic and financial crisis. An *ad interim* government, Monti's executive demonstrates that the crisis is also (and perhaps especially)

political given the state of weakness in which Italy's political parties currently find themselves – a state of weakness of which the composition of the executive itself (which, as we have seen is wholly (or almost) without party representatives) is perhaps the most eloquent testimony.

Time, or rather the few months that remain before the next elections, will tell us whether, and if so the extent to which, Italy's parties are capable of reorganising themselves and offering to the voters, credible governing alternatives – just as time will tell whether and if so the extent to which the Monti government is able to meet the expectations that accompanied (and brought about) its formation. What is certain, as we have been able to show from the analysis of the programmatic statement made by Monti to Parliament, is that the Government has an extremely full agenda of commitments despite the strict limits on the amount of time available to it. The Government's 'haste' has thus been reflected in legislative activity that can certainly not be regarded as ordinary bearing in mind that almost six government initiatives out of ten (excluding bills to ratify international agreements and treaties) have been presented to Parliament in the form of emergency decrees. The Government has thus shown a desire to 'force' Parliament to approve quickly the measures it has adopted, in the awareness, perhaps, that notwithstanding its extraordinary size, the heterogeneous majority that keeps it in office is in no sense able to guarantee such an outcome. In this connection, we have seen that the executive has not confined itself to the presentation of emergency decrees but has very often had recourse to votes of confidence and has done so in a strategic way, in order to give ironclad protection to a specific 'package' of important measures.

How appropriate and effective these same measures have been are questions that, once again, will be answered in the months and years to come by analyses that will necessarily have to be more specifically focused and more incisive than it is possible to be in an overview of the kind offered here.

*Translated by James L. Newell*

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> One of the exceptions concerns the undersecretary at the ministry for Relations with Parliament, Giampaolo D'Andrea, who had been a member of the Chamber of Deputies during the course of the eleventh legislature and of the Senate during the fourteenth legislature, and an undersecretary in the first Prodi government and in Massimo D'Alema's government. The case of the junior Defence minister, Gianluigi Magri, is another partial exception. He had been an undersecretary during the Berlusconi government, and in particular he has clear political affiliations having been an activist, first within the ranks of the Christian Democrats, and then in the *Unione di Centro* (in which capacity he was a

provincial secretary in Bologna besides being a member of the Bologna city council).

<sup>2</sup> The ministers with portfolio come to 13, including the Prime Minister, as some have more than one office. More specifically, Monti is also minister for the Economy; Corrado Passera is minister both for Infrastructure and for Economic Development. The ministers without portfolio come to 6 in total.

<sup>3</sup> In the case of the Chamber of Deputies, abstentions are considered as votes in favour. The Chamber's standing orders stipulate that abstentions count for the purposes of establishing whether the assembly is quorate but not for the purposes of determining whether the required percentage voting in favour has been reached. Abstentions thus have the effect of lowering the majority threshold that must be reached in order for motions of confidence to be approved (they have the de facto effect of a vote in favour). In the Senate, by contrast, abstentions do count for the purposes of determining whether the threshold has been reached thus raising the number of votes necessary for a positive outcome (they cannot therefore be counted as votes in favour).

<sup>4</sup> In Figure 3 we can see that the Dini government itself obtained the support or abstention of about 90 percent of the deputies (those in favour of the confidence motion had however been just 302, equal to 48 percent of the members of the Chamber, while the number of deputies that abstained had been 270, or about 43 percent) as compared to just over 60 percent of the senators. The Ciampi government, on the other hand, had obtained 491 votes in the Chamber (309 in favour with 182 abstentions) equal to 78 percent of the deputies, and 162 votes in favour in the Senate, equal to just over 51 percent of the membership.

<sup>5</sup> See the previous issues of this journal, and the various editions of the Report on the activities of the Italian government edited by the Centre for the Study of Political Change (CIRCaP) at the University of Siena ([www.circap.unisi.it](http://www.circap.unisi.it))

<sup>6</sup> In reality the literature often distinguishes between 'actual defined' commitments (whose realisation is empirically verifiable; for example 'A gradual and progressive reduction of the tax burden to below 40 percent) and 'actual undefined' commitments (concrete promises, but which do not have verifiable implementation criteria; for example: 'the testing of new incentives for private-company investments'). Here we do not make this distinction which, though useful when analysing programmatic documents (such as coalition agreements), seems less appropriate in the case of oral statements (which by their very nature are less detailed and precise).

<sup>7</sup> This kind of normalisation of the number of commitments is necessary when analysing documents of varying lengths.

<sup>8</sup> Note that we are considering as if it were a single executive, the first and second D'Alema governments, which followed on from one another during the course of the thirteenth legislature (the programmatic statement analysed here is the one made by D'Alema in October 1998).

<sup>9</sup> We have again used the database concerning government activities hosted by CIRCaP at the University of Siena.

<sup>10</sup> Emergency decrees passed by the second Prodi government eight months into its term played a smaller role, amounting to just over 32 percent of the total number of government initiatives.

<sup>11</sup> We cannot go further than this. In other words, we can establish the existence of a connection but not how strong it is. In and of itself, the fact that a

government proposal concerns a programmatic commitment, tells us nothing about the extent to which the initiative is consistent with the commitment, nor whether, once approved by Parliament, it would actually fulfil the predefined objectives. We are not therefore able (nor are we here concerned with the matter) to assess the extent to which the current government has been able to keep its 'promises'.

<sup>12</sup> To which should be added three votes of confidence attached by the Monti government to proposals introduced earlier by the outgoing Berlusconi government.

<sup>13</sup> This happened with the bill to reform the labour market; with the decree concerning simplification and development (decree law no. 5 of 2012); with the decree law concerning competition and competitiveness (no. 1 of 2012). These were all measures that were made matters of confidence both in the Chamber and in the Senate.

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