THE ELECTION OF CARLO AZEGLIO CIAMPI TO THE PRESIDENCY OF THE REPUBLIC

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At 13.04 on Thursday, 13 May 1999, on the first ballot, a joint session of parliament elected the seventy-nine-year-old Treasury Minister, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, to the office of the ninth President of the Italian Republic (tenth if the 'provisional' President Enrico De Nicola, in office from 1946 to approval of the Constitution, is included in the list). This was only the second time in the history of the Italian presidential elections¹ that a candidate had been elected on the first ballot. On the single previous occasion (1985) – following adroit negotiations by the secretary of the *Democrazia cristiana* (Christian Democrats: DC), Ciriaco De Mita – the choice had fallen on the then President of the Senate, Francesco Cossiga, ex-Prime Minister, and Minister of the Interior at the time of the Aldo Moro kidnapping. The 707 votes gained by Ciampi (representing 71.4 percent of those entitled to vote) suggest a substantial majority, (albeit one not much over the quorum of 674 votes) in favour of the centre-left candidate. Yet the 183 votes lacking from the theoretical majority which should have sustained Ciampi from the first round of voting suggest that there were those who would have preferred matters to be much less clear-cut. There were some, that is to say, who counted on the possibility that, if the two-thirds threshold was not achieved on the first ballot, Parliament would see the onset of horse-trading of the kind conducted by the Christian Democrats on at least three previous occasions – the elections of Giovanni Gronchi

(1955), of Giovanni Leone (1971), and of Oscar Luigi Scalfaro (1992) – with unpredictable consequences for the candidate, for the solidity of the majority, and for Parliament. Indeed one can plausibly claim, given the importance assumed by the presidential election, that the duration of the legislature itself was in question.

Even taking account of the votes against Ciampi – explicitly declared only by the *Lega Nord* (Northern League: LN), which voted for its ‘flag’ candidate, Senator Luciano Gasperini (seventy-two votes), and by *Rifondazione Comunista* (Communist Refoundation: PRC), which cast the majority of its votes for the elderly Communist leader Pietro Ingrao (twenty-one votes) – there were still some 185 defectors. Some of these ‘snipers’ evidently voted against the instructions of their party leaders, choosing other candidates in the majority coalition such as, for example, Rosa Russo Iervolino (sixteen votes) of the *Partito Popolare* (Italian Popular Party: PPI), Giulio Andreotti (ten votes), the President of the Senate Nicola Mancino (six votes), the ex-secretary of the PPI, Mino Martinazzoli, (four votes), the governor of the Bank of Italy Antonio Fazio (four votes), and the former President of the Republic Francesco Cossiga (three votes). Although these votes were presumably cast by members of the PPI, and hence by the Christian Democrat diaspora, they were certainly not untargeted. Rather, they served a distinct purpose and should be interpreted not as a signal of persisting dissent but as an attempt to keep the presidential election open.

There were at least three reasons why this attempt was not entirely impracticable. Firstly, reaching consensus on Ciampi had by no means been straightforward, and it was achieved only on the evening before voting was due to start. Secondly, although the secretary of the PPI, Franco Marini, was out manoeuvred at the meeting held by the majority leadership that evening, he certainly did not give up the struggle. Thirdly, not even the *Polo per le libertà* (Liberty Pole), which had entertained the idea of testing the cohesion of the majority coalition on the first ballot before voting for Ciampi, could have long supported a candidate who had lost his official legitimacy following devastating defections from within his majority. That nothing actually happened can be taken to be an excellent and encouraging outcome on several counts. It is encouraging firstly as regards the general political relationships between the centre-left majority, i.e. what is left of the *Ulivo*, on the one hand, and the *Polo* on the other. The second and correlated reason is that it prompts optimism as to the resumption of institutional reform, not least because of the view attributed to Ciampi that a majoritarian and bipolar party system is necessary in order to enhance Italy’s role in Europe. The third reason, this too correlated

with the former two, is that Ciampi's election bodes well for the stability of the Italian political situation and for the completion – following significant electoral, institutional and constitutional reforms – of the country's long and incomplete transition.

The Strategy followed by the Popular Party

In each of these respects, all the other main political actors correctly located the actual and/or perceived position of the PPI on the side of institutional and constitutional conservatism. The secretary of the PPI, Franco Marini, must have realised that he was at a disadvantage from the outset. In fact, in order to make up lost ground and move his party, and himself, to the forefront of the race for the presidency, he devised a strategy intended to show that the PPI could boast numerous suitable candidates for the Quirinale. In order to persuade both his centre-left allies and at least part of the *Polo* opposition alliance – or conversely the *Polo*'s allies and some of the opponents of renewal in the majority coalition – Marini deployed a combination of old and new arguments. For some time, in fact, not only Marini but the majority of the PPI had believed that they could use Italy's incomplete transition to repropose the outgoing President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro as candidate for the Quirinale, and with good chances of success. The most convincing argument was that Scalfaro had ensured – albeit amid perhaps inevitable controversy – the continuity of transition over the past seven tormented years, and that he had facilitated the achievement of several important outcomes (six governments formed and supported by multiple majorities; two dissolutions of parliament).² He therefore deserved to continue his work until the transition had been completed. To this end, the idea was circulated among the parties that, with the *Bicamerale* (Bicameral Commission on Institutional Reform) having failed, it was sufficient to extend Scalfaro's presidential mandate, perhaps for a couple of years, for the noble and specific purpose of resuming and promulgating reform.³ The idea was superficially attractive, not least because it seemed to rescue the chestnuts from the political fire while confirming the power of the politicians.

Constitutionally, however, any extension of Scalfaro's mandate was highly dubious, as well as being disruptive, because it would have required a constitutional amendment, something extremely difficult to accomplish in the short run. Politically, the proposal was defeated by the opposition raised by the *Polo*, especially by the leader of the ex-fascist *Alleanza nazionale* (National Alliance: AN) Gianfranco Fini, but also – as far as one can tell from their some-

what wayward pronouncements – by Umberto Bossi, the leader of the separatist *Lega Nord* (Northern League: LN). Fini's opposition did not stem from a unreasoning hostility *ad personam*. On the contrary, it was deeply rooted in his strongly critical assessment of the performance of the Scalfaro Presidency both as an institution and as the exercise of power (see below).

Slowly but surely, Scalfaro's recandidature for a full seven-year term, or a two-year extension of his mandate, faded into the background. For that matter, Scalfaro was not a candidate whose election Marini could claim to be his own work. If Scalfaro had managed to remain at the Quirinale, it would have been because of his own personal merits, while Marini urgently needed the election of a candidate who would demonstrate that the secretary of the *Popolari* wielded effective power and who would emphasise the crucial role that the *Popolari* – despite their reduced and, according to some, still declining electoral support – had acquired and were now exercising.

Of course, no argument of this kind (pivoting as it did on the power and visibility of the PPI) could be presented and justified in public. Marini consequently resorted to two other arguments that could lay claim to greater dignity. In truth, the first of them – the attempt to restore equilibrium within the centre-left majority – revealed that Marini's political thinking still tenaciously clung to the tradition of the First Republic. Indeed, one of the criteria most frequently and successfully used in screening presidential candidates during the First Republic had been the need to alternate the Quirinale between the Christian Democrats and their 'lay' (i.e. non-Catholic) partners. Naturally, there were some exceptions – the Christian Democrat Antonio Segni succeeded the Christian Democrat Gronchi in 1962, and likewise the Christian Democrat Scalfaro succeeded the Christian Democrat Cossiga – but these were exceptions justified by the circumstances. Gronchi was not the official Christian Democrat candidate in 1955 (he was elected thanks to deciding votes cast by the left), and Segni's election was justifiable in that it restored the balance both within the DC, reassuring the nervous right wing of the party, and in the relationships between the DC and the Socialists at the beginning of the centre-left period.

The election of Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, however, occurred when all previous arrangements and precedents no longer applied.⁴ From the outset, in fact, the Scalfaro presidential election was influenced and characterised by criteria decidedly different from those of the past. Having suffered a heavy defeat in the general elections of 5–6 April 1992, the main concern of the Christian Democrats and the Socialists, together with the Liberals and the Social Democrats, was to redeem that defeat. At the same time, however, the three leaders

of the CAF (Craxi, Andreotti and Forlani) found themselves caught up in a damaging and highly suspect struggle for only two offices: the Presidency of the Republic and the Premiership. The problem could not be solved by applying the criterion of the Christian Democrat/lay alternation in the Quirinale, firstly because Craxi seemed to prefer his own return to Palazzo Chigi (the Prime Minister's residence), and secondly because Andreotti, and to a lesser extent Forlani, now ageing and at the end of their careers, both seemed to prefer the Quirinale. Given that following the unexpected resignation of President Cossiga some months before the expiry of his mandate, it would be the new President of the Republic who nominated the Prime Minister, Craxi preferred to see Forlani elected, having less trust in Andreotti (whom he had once warned with the jibe that 'sooner or later all foxes end up as fur coats'). However, Forlani's election proved extremely difficult, and after a protracted series of ballots, thirteen in all, he withdrew. It should be noted that Scalfaro's election was brought about by an event as unforeseeable as it was traumatic: the Mafia bomb attack which took the lives of judge Giovanni Falcone, his wife and his escort.

Having just been elected President of the Chamber of Deputies, Scalfaro had never seriously been a candidate for the Quirinale, but when parliamentarians experienced an outbreak of conscience in the wake of the attack on Falcone, he had two distinct advantages. Firstly, his impartiality had already been acknowledged by his election to the Presidency of the Chamber, a position which in the past had often been a useful springboard to the Presidency of the Republic (Gronchi, Leone and Pertini had all been Presidents of the Chamber of Deputies, and Cossiga of the Senate). His second and best advantage was his reputation as a 'defender' of Parliament and of its prerogatives. By virtue of this reputation, the leader of the Radicals, Marco Pannella, proposed Scalfaro as a candidate for the Quirinale in open opposition to Cossiga, who was more or less correctly described as 'presidentialist'.

There are two features that should be borne in mind when seeking to understand how the political establishment squared off for the election of the President in May 1999. Firstly, although not elected as such, Scalfaro belonged to the cultural tradition and political history of the Christian Democrats. Consequently, another President from the ranks of the *Popolari* (as members of the PPI are known) would have prolonged the Christian Democrats' grip upon the Quirinale to twenty-one years, which was too long by any reasonable standard. Although nobody would have applied such a narrow numerical calculation to unexceptionable *Popolari* candidates, it had an importance that Marini seems to have entirely underestimated.

As to Scalfaro's second advantage, his 'parliamentarism', it is an irony of history that he was involved in a transition that compelled him to behave as a 'presidentialist', or almost. I shall develop this important point later. To return to Marini, his revival of the Christian Democrat/lay criterion was somewhat curious, for he applied it to the distribution of offices among the leaders of the centre-left. Since the prime minister at that time was Massimo D'Alema of the Democrats of the Left, Marini declared that the office of President of the Republic should be conferred, by way of a highly unusual trade-off, on the PPI, which was the second largest party in the governing coalition. Anybody who knew anything about the way Italian politics works – the entire political class in the broadest sense of the term, journalists included – regarded the exchange as improper and unfair unless it had been an unspoken agreement of the government crisis of October 1998 which brought D'Alema to Palazzo Chigi in the place of Prodi. In fact, barring unpredictable and traumatic events, Presidents of the Italian Republic remain in office for seven years. Barring equally unpredictable, though much less traumatic, events Italian prime ministers last for approximately ten-and-a-half months. Hence not even the most optimistic prime minister could expect to remain in office, even with interruptions, for the full seven years (only De Gasperi had ever managed to do so).

Of course, behind Marini's demand lay the ill-concealed threat of provoking a government crisis should the secretary of the Democrats of the Left, Walter Veltroni, who was brokering the negotiations for the nomination of the President, not accede to the demands of the PPI. Moreover, with a leap of political logic that is difficult to justify, Marini argued that a *Popolari* candidate for the Quirinale would have restored the balance not only within the centre-left coalition but also between the centre-left and the centre-right, between the governing majority and the *Polo* opposition alliance. Marini's idiosyncratic geometry seriously alarmed Veltroni and the DS, who feared that Marini might attempt to put together a broad Christian Democrat centre alliance by reaching an understanding with Berlusconi and Forza Italia on the PPI's candidate for the Presidency, who might even have been Marini himself.

Other positions, other criteria

For a while the president of Forza Italia, Silvio Berlusconi, entertained the idea of driving a wedge between the centre-left by supporting Marini. His ally Fini rejected any such suggestion from the outset, however, both because it would have marginalised the AN

and because it would have reinvigorated the centrist parties, thereby encouraging a return to the broadly consociational and proportionalist style of politics so long practised by the DC. Thus, throughout the run-up to the presidential election, Fini continued to insist on a candidate who would come out in favour of a majoritarian and bipolar system and who was not declaredly hostile to presidentialism.⁵

Incidentally, these principles were largely shared by Veltroni, although he had to deal with the conspicuous institutional conservatism of the centre-left, which was embraced, not particularly covertly, even within the ranks of the Democrats of the Left. Implicit in Fini's insistence was a sharp criticism of President Scalfaro, a criticism which Forza Italia and Berlusconi could only endorse because it referred in particular to the so-called *ribaltone* (literally 'overturning' of the parliamentary majority) caused by the LN's defection from the Berlusconi government coalition in December 1994–January 1995 and which had led to formation of the Dini government. At the time, both Berlusconi and Fini had called stridently, but ultimately unsuccessfully, for new elections after their political-parliamentary-governmental betrayal by Bossi's *leghisti*.⁶

In the meantime, there had been two dramatic new developments, one concerning the candidates, the other concerning methods. With an off-hand remark, Giuliano Amato – much interviewed by the media and closely listened to by politicians – hinted at the possibility of a woman candidate for the Quirinale, the first in history. A broad-based committee which contained few representatives of the political class, but a far wider and prominent cast of journalists, actors, businessmen and super-models, came together to support the candidacy, not just of a woman, but of the European Commissioner Emma Bonino. First a deputy for the Radicals and then a Euro-MP, at the forefront of the Italian battles for contraception, divorce and abortion, vigorously committed to human and women's rights, most recently involved in the creation of the International Tribunal of Human Rights, Emma Bonino accepted the candidature offered her by the 'Emma for President' Committee only on 7 March 1999, although her provocative slogan 'The right man for the Quirinale', which emphasised that ability, not gender, was the key to her campaign, had already been in circulation for some months. The impact on public opinion was forceful and extremely positive. A poll conducted by UNICAB in February showed that 67 percent of Italians thought that the parties should declare the names of their candidates for the Presidency; that 81 percent thought that the candidatures should be publicly debated; that 88 percent thought that the various political alignments should describe "the programme and characteristics of their candidates for the Presidency of the Republic".⁷

Thus, the overwhelming majority of the respondents were critical of the secrecy that surrounds the selection of candidates for the Presidency, greatly preferring open public debate on the merits and shortcomings of candidates. The process of electing the President of the Italian Republic is notoriously opaque. There are no declared candidates; indeed, anyone who might be a candidate carefully avoids being mentioned for fear of being 'burnt off'. It is a common strategy to propose someone else as a candidate with the deliberate purpose of eliminating him/her by instigating criticism, reservations and alternative proposals. The years have seen so many smear campaigns, so much scandal mongering and blackmail that no historian of the Presidency of the Republic or constitutionalist would dare to claim that the best candidate, the one most prominent or most representative of his time and of Italian politics, has ever been elected (not even Luigi Einaudi or Sandro Pertini, in very different periods, could be described as the best candidates at their elections). Consequently, the innovative way in which Bonino presented her candidacy was attractive and much appreciated. Her campaign was transparent, presented her merits, encouraged open discussion of her qualities, and finally, in a letter to parliamentarians just prior to the vote, even published her programme, which featured a closely argued constitutional criticism of the outgoing President and his over-frequent and often biased public pronouncements.

The more that Emma Bonino's candidature caught the attention of the media (usually loath to 'cover' events that have not been created by themselves or by their political cronies⁸) the more the method of innuendo, intimidation and deal-fixing stubbornly clung to by Marini appeared outmoded and foolish. It was at this point that Walter Veltroni realised that the situation was unsustainable. Inevitable comparisons were being drawn between Marini's roster of undeclared candidates (evergreen figures whose chief qualifications were a past in the old DC and a decidedly flexible attitude to the composition of the parliamentary majority necessary to elect one of them) and Emma Bonino, whose record as a European Commissioner had been widely eulogised in the German press, as well as in the much more demanding British press.

Ciampi's candidature

Having rejected the *Polo's* request for a roster of names, Veltroni set himself the arduous task of finding the centre-left's candidate. He declared that the majority coalition would propose its candidate to the *Polo* as well in the hope of gaining its consent. Although the

Polo objected that this 'take it or leave it' procedure was too rigid, and indeed amounted to an imposition, Veltroni's greatest difficulty lay with the governing majority. The Polo took prompt advantage by suggesting the name of Giuliano Amato, who belonged to neither the DS nor the PPI, as a candidate for whom it would be willing to vote. Veltroni was therefore now compelled to counter both the flourishing candidature of Emma Bonino and the nascent one of Giuliano Amato. Marini's continuing strategy of proposing a roster of *Popolari* candidates seems incomprehensible, unless he himself was aspiring to the Quirinale and was only waiting until his candidates were rejected and someone, namely the Democrats of the Left but better still Berlusconi, offered him a candidature that he could not refuse. Indeed, he would have graciously accepted it for seemingly reasonable motives: out of a sense of duty, in order to avert a head-on clash between the centre-left and the Polo, and because, in his idiosyncratic view, the PPI were entitled to the Presidency of the Republic in any case.

It thus came about that Veltroni decided to launch the candidature of Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, and he did so by acting in a manner which was entirely at odds with the former system, for various reasons. Firstly, Veltroni made the explicit and timely announcement of an individual who might well have risked being 'burnt off' under the former system. Secondly, he chose a non-politician who consequently represented none of the parties. Thirdly, he not only announced Ciampi's name, but drew up a list of the criteria and therefore the qualities that had led him to choose Ciampi as the best candidate possible.⁹

From that moment on, anyone wishing to oppose Ciampi would have to follow suit by stating the qualities and achievements of their own candidate. Of course, according to these criteria, Emma Bonino's candidature was still well on course. But objectively, as well as being substantially unacceptable to the ex-Christian Democrats now part of the centre-left and, even more numerous still, in the Polo, Bonino was probably also objectionable to a large proportion of the centre-left, given that she had been elected a deputy within the ranks of the Polo at the fateful elections of 1994. In the meantime, although overshadowed by NATO's military action against Serbia, until the last week of the electoral campaign, the referendum on the abolition of the remaining PR element in the electoral system provoked further conflict between the PPI and the DS and became a factor in the selection of the presidential candidate. The split was particularly apparent between Marini and Veltroni, who stuck to the official party line of supporting a majoritarian and bipolar system, while both sides in the referen-

dum campaign (but more the supporters of the 'Yes' vote) improperly regarded the outcome as a factor to be given serious consideration when the time came to elect the President of the Republic.

More specifically, the 'Yes' supporters, prematurely convinced of their success, asked the voters to return a result that would strengthen the majoritarian character of the electoral system and favour the election to the presidency of someone who, as the slogan put it, was assuredly 'majoritarian and bipolar': in other words, a person whose political record guaranteed that s/he would ensure conversion of the referendum result into a truly majoritarian electoral law and steer the political system towards genuine bipolarity. Of course, none of the PPI's candidates – by history, culture or commitment – could fulfil these criteria. The only exception was the President of the Senate, Nicola Mancino, who (precisely because of his qualities) had never officially figured among the names proposed by Marini except at the end, when it was too late, whereupon he commendably ruled himself out of consideration, announcing that he did not wish to create divisions in the majority.

The meaning of the Presidency

The somewhat low-key referendum campaign introduced into the political and constitutional debate the alternative – obstinately resisted by the majority of leftist constitutionalists – between a 'continuist' and 'reformist' interpretation of the Constitution. Oddly enough, most of the conservative-leaning institutional and constitutional jurists belonged to the political left. Almost all of them had for years underestimated the weight of the long-drawn-out Italian transition on any interpretation of the Constitution that failed to take it into account. The majority did no more than call for an evidently unlikely 'return' to the Constitution, thereby contradicting their own assertion that the constitutional set-up and the workings of the political-constitutional system were constructed and predicated on a proportional electoral system. With the elimination of the proportional system, even the more conservative jurists ought to have regarded undertaking a careful reform both of the parliamentary system and of the President/Parliament/Government 'circuit' as imperative since both had been distorted by the new electoral law, as indeed the whole Scalfaro presidency – value judgements aside – had shown all too clearly.

Under this legitimate interpretation, a positive outcome of the referendum would have intensified both political pressures and the juridical need to update the Constitution and reform the institu-

tions. Of course there was no guarantee that the current members of parliament – as always resistant to reform – would have accepted this interpretation of the referendum result and set about making the necessary changes. In any event, the problem never arose and consequently no counter-proof is forthcoming. In fact, rather surprisingly, the electoral referendum narrowly failed to achieve the necessary quorum of votes.¹⁰ Whereupon, flushed by what he considered to be his victory, having always been explicitly against the referendum, Marini committed the reverse error to that of the promoters of the referendum. He thought that the result could be used to turn the clock back and secure the election to the Presidency of a candidate who was neither majoritarian nor bipolar: his preference being for one of the *Popolari* candidates that he had nominated (and, naturally, for himself). More precisely, on realising that the campaign in favour of Emma Bonino had left its mark even on his own party – which was anything but in favour of greater representation for women – Marini proposed Rosa Russo Iervolino, the incumbent Minister of the Interior, and, as a back-stop, Sergio Mattarella, Deputy Prime Minister and author of the controversial electoral law that had survived the referendum.

Yet the reality of the political and parliamentary situation was not as Marini imagined. Although the electoral reformers had lost, this did not mean that the institutional conservatives and the electoral restorationists enjoyed a majority in the country and in Parliament, still less that the failure of the referendum would raise a conservative wind of such intensity that it would sweep a candidate backed by the PPI into the Quirinale. There was too little support in Parliament and no particular sign that public opinion was favourable either. In the meantime, moreover, Berlusconi's determination to split the centre-left majority by supporting a *Popolari* candidate, rather than the one preferred by the DS, began to falter. Faced with the uncompromising stand taken by Fini, who insisted on a 'majoritarian and bipolar candidate not hostile to presidentialism', Berlusconi decided not to risk creating a cleavage within the *Polo* or, even worse, finding himself excluded from voting for the successful candidate. With unity restored to the *Polo*, it was apparently a last-minute intervention by Prime Minister D'Alema that settled the centre-left's choice of Ciampi.

One can only hypothesise that D'Alema, on receiving Berlusconi's reassurances of support (Fini had never shifted his position), was able to call the bluff of a government crisis that the secretary of the PPI was certainly reluctant to play. It would in fact have been extremely difficult, though not impossible, for Marini to justify a government crisis on the ground that the centre-left, with the *Polo*'s

approval, was proposing not a member of the DS, but the Minister of the Treasury for the Presidency of the Republic. It was at this juncture that the personality of the candidate made all the difference.

Neither the centre-left nor the Polo could deny Ciampi's merits, which are by now a matter of historical record. Governor of the Bank of Italy after the crisis provoked by Andreotti's attempt to undermine the independence of the Bank in 1979; Prime Minister from April 1993 to the elections of March 1994, and therefore the overseer of the approval of the electoral law imposed by the April 1993 referendum on electoral reform; and then, after a two-year political sabbatical, Minister of the Treasury in the Prodi government, Ciampi had (has) an extraordinary curriculum which has combined (and still combines) considerable technical expertise with proven political skills. Curiously, the two architects of Italy's unexpected entry into European monetary union, Romano Prodi and Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, have been rewarded as rarely happens in politics (and even more rarely in Italian politics). With the highly fortunate – because it was made possible by the unexpected resignation of the entire European Commission headed by Santer – appointment of Prodi to Presidency of the European Commission, and with Ciampi's election to the Presidency of the Italian Republic, a period of Italian political history as positive as it is (almost) virtuous has come to a close. And another period has now begun in which the Ciampi Presidency can and will have to exercise the powers with which that high office is endowed.

The future of the reforms

That said, nobody truly believes that the method used to reach agreement between the centre-left and the Polo on Ciampi's election can be automatically extended to Italy's controversial institutional reforms. An election, which can be resolved at a stroke, is quite a different matter from a set of decisions with respect to which the minorities in both alignments may make repeated use of their power of veto, in both the special Commissions and the Chambers. Moreover, institutional recipes and constitutional models provoke far more controversy and conflict in the Italian Parliament and among jurists and political scientists than does the generic objective of constructing a majoritarian and bipolar political system. Finally, now that the phase of constitutional rhetoric has passed, no-one believes that the constitutional reforms can be steered, still less achieved, by the Quirinale (though their passage might be eased). Those who want a majoritarian and bipolar outcome to the Italian transition will be relieved that the occupant of the Quirinale has no party affilia-

tions to represent and favour; an occupant whose past as a militant in the *Partito d'Azione* is essentially European and therefore bipolar.

Nevertheless, precisely because President Ciampi's deepest values were formed during the resistance in this short-lived, non-confessional, liberal and progressive political organisation, his conduct in office will adhere closely to the rules and will respect the limits of his power. Paradoxically, however, what counts most among the Italian President's attributes are his twin powers to nominate the Prime Minister and to dissolve Parliament, and given the seven-year duration of Ciampi's mandate he is bound to be confronted by both problems. In this regard, it will be sufficient if Ciampi ensures that no hasty 'outburst' prejudices his exercise of these two powers to make the political establishment much more responsible in its behaviour. For example, if those who provoke a government crisis know that the President is willing on principle to dissolve Parliament during a crisis, they will take very careful consideration of the President's position. So too will those who do not oppose the crisis in the hope of exploiting it to their own advantage, up to and including higher office in the event of a government reshuffle: a strategy as practicable and constitutional as it is deleterious to the building of a majoritarian and bipolar democracy.¹¹ Unfortunately, Ciampi did not apply this healthy principle in the crisis experienced by D'Alema's government just before Christmas 1999.

One may plausibly argue that if the Scalfaro Presidency, with its positive and negative aspects, can be judged satisfactory, this is essentially because Scalfaro prevented Italy's political and institutional transition from lapsing into a crisis of the democratic system. Since May 1999 the Ciampi Presidency (1999–2006) has been faced by an even more elevated, complicated and ambitious task: the truly historic endeavour of accomplishing Italy's transition by means of constitutional reform and a recasting of the party system. Not only is it legitimate to expect commitment by the Quirinale to this undertaking, but certain jurists maintain that it is precisely this that should be the most widely shared 'sense of constitutional unity'. Ciampi has already begun by appealing to political leaders and parliamentarians, declaring that transition can be successfully brought to conclusion. Thanks to his authoritativeness and his admirable intention – as he himself has declared – to 'put his soul' into what he does, President Ciampi appears perfectly positioned – to use Giuliano Amato's metaphor – to play all the notes of the 'accordion of presidential powers'.¹² However, it is by no means certain that parties and coalitions, on the right, on the left, and at the centre, have any intention of dancing to that music.

Notes

This chapter is a revised and extended version of my article 'The Election of the Tenth President of the Italian Republic' published in the *Journal of Modern Political Studies*, vol. 4, no. 3 (Fall 1999), 405–15.

1. For useful analysis of these elections see A. Baldassarre and C. Mezzanotte, *Gli uomini del Quirinale. Da De Nicola a Pertini*, Roma-Bari, 1992.
2. Specifically, the following governments: Amato (June 1992–April 1993), Ciampi (April 1993–May 1994); Berlusconi (May 1994–January 1995); Dini (January 1995–May 1996); Prodi (May 1996–October 1998); D'Alema (October 1998 –).
3. I show why this argument was based on serious misunderstandings of the outcome of the *Bicamerale* in my 'Post-mortem of the Bicamerale' in *Politics in Italy: The Return of Politics*, eds David Hine and Salvatore Vassallo, Bologna, 2000, 101–20.
4. I analysed this election in my 'Electing the President of the Republic', in *The End of Post-war Politics in Italy*, eds Gianfranco Pasquino and Patrick McCarthy, Boulder, 1993, 121–40.
5. Fini's words were: 'a President who believes in bipolarism and is not hostile to presidentialism', quoted *La Repubblica*, 8 May 1999.
6. Opinions differ significantly on this point. I have argued that *ribaltoni* are possible, but only in certain circumstances and with 'parliamentarist' consequences, in my *Mandato popolare e governo*, Bologna, 1995. A substantially positive judgement of Scalfaro's presidency is D. Hine and E. Poli, 'La Presidenza Scalfaro nel 1996: Il difficile ritorno alla normalità', in *Politica in Italia. Edizione 97*, eds R. D'Alimonte and D. Nelkin, Bologna, 1998, 203–21. By contrast, C. Fusaro, *Le radici del semipresidenzialismo*, Soveria Mannelli, 1998, is decidedly critical (see especially 148ff.). Considerable far-sightedness for the time was shown by Vincent Della Sala, 'The Cossiga legacy and Scalfaro's elections in the Shadow of Presidentialism?' in *Italian Politics: A Review*, eds S. Hellman and G. Pasquino, London, 1993, 34–49.
7. UNICAB survey, *Elezione del presidente della Repubblica*, February 1999.
8. Worth mentioning is the position taken up by *La Repubblica*: substantial silence by its editor Ezio Mauro; a swingeing attack by Eugenio Scalfari on Emma Bonino, which can only be explained by his enmity for Marco Pannella: in fact, the only real reservation concerning Bonino's candidacy was that she might become Pannella's stooge; criticisms by Miriam Mafai; and support by Mario Pirani, who rated Ciampi and Amato equally, but which was in any case a great boost for Bonino. By contrast, serious consideration was made of Bonino's candidacy by the editors of *Il Corriere della Sera* and, in general, *Il Sole 24 Ore*.
9. Interview with Veltroni, *La Repubblica*, 13 March 1999, with a listing of Ciampi's merits: 'First: Ciampi is committed to bipolarism. Second: he is not a party member. Third: he is not even a member of parliament. Fourth: he can guarantee that the transition will continue and the reforms will be made. Fifth: he is a supporter of the Euro. Sixth: he enjoys great international prestige. Seventh: he is a layman in politics, although personally he is a Catholic'.
10. See the analysis by M. Donovan in this volume.
11. Unfortunately, Ciampi could do nothing to prevent the somewhat bizarre government crisis that developed just before Christmas 1999, though he did actively contribute to resolving it.

12. I have developed this only apparently musical conception of presidential powers, aptly suggested by Giuliano Amato, in my essay 'La fisarmonica del Presidente', *La Rivista dei libri*, March 1992, 8–10. More generally, on the role and powers of the Italian President see S. Merlini, 'I presidenti della Repubblica', in *La politica italiana. Dizionario critico 1945–95*, ed. Gianfranco Pasquino, Rome-Bari, 1995, 93–119.