INTRODUCTION: THE MONTI GOVERNMENT AND THE DOWNGRADE OF ITALIAN PARTIES

Anna Bosco and Duncan McDonnell

The year 2011 seems likely to be remembered not only as the year when Silvio Berlusconi's government fell after three years in office, but as the year when the Italian Second Republic entered its final phase. Having been dominated since 1994 by the pro-/anti-Berlusconi cleavage, Italian politics and its party system at the end of 2011 appeared to be moving, or at least stumbling, toward a new and uncertain configuration. The obvious immediate reason for this was the resignation of the government on 12 November in the face of a financial crisis that was rendering the country's debt unsustainable and its party political leaders ever less internationally credible. Nonetheless, the simple conclusion that the Berlusconi government was replaced by Mario Monti's technocratic executive due to pressure from the markets and the European Union (EU) is not sufficient to understand either why this event occurred or what its effects might be.

As the chapters in this volume show, the financial crisis impacted on a party political system that was already debilitated and capable only of reacting (slowly and poorly) to events. It is therefore no surprise that key actors both inside and outside Italy had little faith in the ability of the country's politicians to tackle such a major emergency. In this sense, 2011 can be seen as the year when Italy avoided defaulting on its public debt, but when its party political class failed to avoid

a very public downgrade. For the most part, this class has remained the same since the 1990s, when the Second Republic was born on the twin promise of producing efficient government and restoring public confidence in party politics after the Tangentopoli scandals. Almost two decades later, both of these promises stand unfulfilled. Faith in politicians, parties, and Parliament is at an all-time low, and over three-quarters of Italians believe corruption is as bad as—or even worse than—20 years ago.¹ Meanwhile, successive governments of the center-right and the center-left have patently failed to deal with the structural problems of Italy's economy and society, appearing instead more concerned with keeping their respective coalitions together and protecting or criticizing Berlusconi.

The downgrade of Italy's parties was symbolically ratified a week after Berlusconi's resignation by the swearing in of a technocratic government led by former European Commissioner Mario Monti and containing no serving members of Parliament or party representatives. In its first months, the new government enjoyed wide parliamentary support, particularly from the two main parties, the center-left Partito Democratico (PD, Democratic Party) and the center-right Popolo della Libertà (PdL, People of Freedom), and from the largely centrist and post-Christian Democratic "third pole" alliance. Although leading figures from the parties supporting Monti often found it difficult to acknowledge publicly the extent of their cross-partisan collaboration, they nonetheless coalesced to help push through a series of painful measures in Parliament. No less importantly, in those first months, they also managed to move beyond the pro-/anti-Berlusconi cleavage that had dominated inter-party relations for almost 20 years.²

The response to the crisis in November and the creation of Monti's technocratic government owe much to the president of the Republic, Giorgio Napolitano, whose interventions have changed the political game for the parties. Napolitano's decision to choose Monti as prime minister also introduced new rules of the game to the practice of government in Italy. Not least among these is the combination of firm action and far less polarized political discussion. Up until the time of writing in early 2012, Monti has enjoyed widespread support among the Italian public, and this increases the challenges and opportunities posed to the parties by his style of government. Whether they will choose to learn from it or ignore it so far remains unclear. Either way, the national arena in which they will next get a chance to govern seems likely to be very different from the one they are familiar with. For, while the Third Republic has not yet begun and we cannot say what it will look like, it seems safe to conclude that the events of 2011 have hastened the end of the Second.

Keeping Up Appearances

As mentioned above, it is easy to fall into the trap of viewing the fall of the Berlusconi government solely within the context of the financial crisis and, particularly, the pressure exerted by Europe and the markets in the second half of the year. However, although crucial to understanding both the timing of the government's collapse and why it was replaced by Monti's cabinet of technocrats, external factors on their own do not fully explain the party downgrade story. While this is not the place for a long discussion of the evolution of party decline in Italy, it is important to remember that the parties were already extremely weak before the financial crisis struck so intensely in mid-2011. As the chapter by Mauro Barisione and that by Luigi Ceccarini, Ilvo Diamanti, and Marc Lazar in this volume clearly show, Italy's political class and its leaders appeared worn out, capable only of repeating a series of old scripts for an increasingly disenchanted audience. In fact, in the first half of 2011, most of the key actors shaping events and representing change in Italian politics and society were non-party figures, including, for example, Napolitano; the leader of Confindustria, Emma Marcegaglia; the organizers of the women's movement and the June referendum campaigns; the new mayor of Milan, Giuliano Pisapia; and officials in the Foreign Ministry. Political parties and their leaders found themselves largely reacting to events, able to do little more than reinterpret them within the pro-/anti-Berlusconi frame that had dominated the entire Second Republic. In other words, the parties were keeping up appearances, but only just.

Not only were the parties tired and fragile in the initial months of 2011, so too was the government. The coalition between the PdL and the northern regionalists of the Lega Nord (LN, Northern League) began the year clinging to its parliamentary majority after a no confidence motion on 14 December 2010 had been defeated in the Chamber of Deputies by a mere three votes (an event that marked the definitive step into opposition by the former PdL "co-founder" Gianfranco Fini and his supporters). It was clear that such a small majority would not be viable in the long term, and so, in early 2011, talk ranged from the possibility of the post-Christian Democratic *Unione di Centro* (UdC, Union of the Center) joining the government, to that of an early general election, to the existence of an "MPs market" in which deputies were allegedly offered incentives of various types to move to the government benches.

In the first half of 2011, the Berlusconi government was thus focused on survival, with its center-left opponents, the PD, unable to bring it down and—as ever—unsure of how they might replace it. Many of

the main issues in Italian politics were the same as in previous years: Berlusconi's battles with the judiciary, his involvement in sex scandals, and the continuing lack of economic and political reforms. However, the most noteworthy responses to Italy's problems in 2011 came increasingly from outside the party system. As Chiara Saraceno observes in her chapter, nobody expected the participation of over a million people in protests on 13 February about the position of women in Italian society—something that the center-left, predictably jumping on the bandwagon, even more predictably sought to reduce to a discussion about Berlusconi's private life. In similar fashion, as Giuseppe Berta's chapter shows, the opposition parties also found themselves outpaced as the most forceful and credible critics of the government's handling of the economy by Emma Marcegaglia, the president of Confindustria. Meanwhile, decisions and discussions on Italy's involvement in the international intervention in Libya, the subject of Osvaldo Croci and Marco Valigi's chapter, were clearly being delegated to officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and, partly, to Napolitano. Berlusconi, whether embarrassed by his lavish welcomes of Gaddafi to Italy in previous years or preoccupied by his ongoing trials, was conspicuous by his absence on the topic.

Thus, the overall impression as the year progressed was that, while Italy's leading politicians continued to make announcements and argue among themselves, they were ever more detached from reality. A good example of this was the LN's insistence in the early summer that fiscal federalism was both viable and on the way. The truth, as Emanuele Massetti explains in his chapter, was rather different. Likewise, the local election victories in May of candidates like Pisapia in Milan and Luigi de Magistris in Naples, examined by Guido Legnante in his chapter, strengthened the perception that the main parties of both center-right and center-left were ceding their roles as the key shapers of public consensus. In particular, Berlusconi's attempt to transform the mayoral run-off elections into the umpteenth "epoch-defining choice of sides" failed miserably. Nor could Pierluigi Bersani, leader of the PD, claim victory too loudly, given that his party's mayoral candidates had been defeated in the Milan center-left primary and in the first round of the Naples election. Predictably, he and his party colleagues preferred to interpret the result as one "against" Berlusconi and his government.

This impression of the parties being sidestepped and left behind by events was reinforced by both the unexpectedly high turnout and the overwhelmingly one-sided results of the referendums on 12 and 13 June, discussed in Chiara Carrozza's chapter. Neither Berlusconi's announcement that he would not bother voting nor Bersani's

opportunistic U-turn on the referendum issue of water privatization was suggestive of visionary leaders capable of shaping events. Rather, the local elections and the referendums seemed to confirm the degree to which Italy in the summer of 2011 was undergoing a wave that was not so much anti-politics (at least in the true sense of the term “politics”) as it was, first and foremost, anti-party. This is borne out by the data on party leaders in Barisione’s chapter, which shows how the main opposition politicians benefited little from the fall in popularity of Berlusconi and the LN leader, Umberto Bossi. Instead, Barisione notes a clear public preference for *super partes*, non-party leaders, first and foremost President Napolitano. As we moved into the second half of 2011, such figures would come to the fore.

The Emperor Has No Clothes

While the government survived the first six months of the year amid scandals of various sorts, judicial issues, and constant speculation about the solidity of its parliamentary majority, from July onward it was quickly sucked into the vortex of the financial crisis. This laid bare both its inability to make tough choices and the divisions within the coalition, which steadily lost international credibility and public support. As the markets turned their attention to Italy at the start of July, the combination of the country’s enormous public debt, weak growth prospects, governmental fragility, and failure to introduce long-promised reforms saw the spread between Italian and German 10-year government bonds widen rapidly. This in turn began to raise the possibility that the state would not be able to sustain its increasingly expensive debt.

Despite the gravity of the situation, the governing parties appeared passive, at the mercy of events, and unable (or unwilling) to pass the measures required to restore market confidence. The lack of a reform agenda was linked, in part, to internal disputes within the PdL. When asked at the start of the year about the delay in promoting economic growth, Berlusconi himself had admitted: “For the last year we have been distracted by what has happened in the PdL.”³ This delay, however, continued throughout 2011. For example, the much-vaunted “kick-start” for the economy, launched on 9 February, in reality only introduced weak measures whose likely efficacy was highly dubious.

The government was further paralyzed in the summer of 2011 by the worsening of relations between the PdL and the LN following the local election and referendum results, by the increasing instability of its parliamentary majority (which depended on the support of a rather

unreliable mixed group of MPs self-styled as “the responsible ones”),⁴ and by the conflict between the PdL minister of the economy, Giulio Tremonti, and most of his own party due to his refusal to cut taxes. As Erik Jones explains in his chapter, the contrasting views of Berlusconi and Tremonti on economic policy represented a key problem for the government, especially since the Italian system makes it nigh on impossible to remove troublesome ministers. In any case, even if it had been possible to do so, Tremonti enjoyed far greater market confidence than the prime minister, and his presence was therefore a necessary evil for Berlusconi. Faced with an increasingly critical situation, but hamstrung by its internal disputes, the PdL leadership was only able to respond by postponing controversial decisions and pushing what little it could through Parliament by confidence votes (a tactic it resorted to 12 times in 2011).⁵

This decisional gridlock was broken only on those occasions when—in the face of market attacks—an external actor such as Napolitano or the European Central Bank (ECB) called for concrete and swift measures. We can see this clearly in the case of the two decrees in July and August to balance the budget. The first, decided by the Cabinet on 30 June, took just two weeks to be passed by Parliament following Napolitano’s request for both government and opposition to reduce discussion to a minimum. Similarly, the second decree quickly secured Cabinet approval on 12 August, just a week after the ECB—in return for its purchase of Italian bonds—had called on the government to formulate a series of reforms to promote growth and to bring forward by a year to 2013 its deadline for achieving a balanced budget.

The tendency of the government to prevaricate at length before finally being pressurized into action by external actors was also demonstrated by its failure to appoint a new governor of the Banca d’Italia (BdI, Bank of Italy) right up until the moment that the sitting governor, Mario Draghi, moved to take up his new position as governor of the ECB. It was not until after both the president of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, and the German chancellor, Angela Merkel, telephoned Berlusconi, urging him to make a decision, that the government finally nominated Ignazio Visco as Draghi’s successor. As for Draghi, his arrival at the ECB served to underline the gulf between the technical excellence and strong international reputation of the BdI, on the one hand, and the shortcomings and lack of credibility plaguing the Italian political class, on the other.

This was evident in the contrast between French support for Draghi’s candidature and Nicolas Sarkozy’s famous smile during a press conference with Chancellor Merkel at the European Council meeting on 23 October, when he was asked about Berlusconi’s ability

to stick to his commitments. On this point, Kenneth Dyson and Lucia Quaglia argue in their chapter that the appointment of Draghi, alongside that of Monti, reflected a new “ascendancy of the technocratic face of the Italian state” that, however, “remained contingent and vulnerable to the domestic idiosyncrasies of Italian politics.”

This spiral of decision paralysis, external reprimands, and loss of credibility reached its climax between the middle of September and the start of November. Following the decisions by the main rating agencies to downgrade Italian debt in late September and early October, the European Commission, Napolitano, and employers’ organizations repeatedly called on the government to launch immediately the reforms required to restore market confidence. The emergency European Council summits on 23 and 26 October added to this pressure by formally requesting assurances that Italy would stick to its commitments on debt reduction, growth, and structural reforms. However, promises would not be enough, and it was clear that the markets, European institutions, and other EU member state leaders now had little or no confidence in the Italian government’s capacity to deliver. Moreover, they were running out of patience—a sentiment reflected by the three-day deadline for details of the reforms issued to Tremonti on 8 November by Commissioner for Economic and Monetary Affairs Olli Rehn.

That same day, 8 November, was more newsworthy for another reason, however: the effective end of the coalition’s grip on power. Almost a month previously, on 11 October, the defeat of the financial accounts legislation in the Chamber of Deputies had laid bare the government’s disappearing majority. Following this, Napolitano had again called for greater cohesion. Despite the inevitable reassurances and a successful confidence motion on 14 October, the government’s majority was now on a knife edge, thanks to the defection of a dozen PdL deputies, and the question of its survival was one occupying not just Italian but also European institutional leaders and commentators. On 4 November, the *Financial Times* echoed the views of many across the continent when it published a damning editorial calling on Berlusconi to step down “in the name of God, Italy and Europe.”⁶ Berlusconi, however, continued to insist that he had both the numbers and the desire to continue until 2013 and, in any case, that he would go only if he lost the support of Parliament. This is precisely what happened on 8 November when the financial accounts vote was repeated. While it was approved, it received eight fewer votes than the confidence motion in October. Forced to admit that he no longer had a majority, Berlusconi told Napolitano that he would resign following the approval of the stability package.

The Suspension of Party Government

Once it became clear that Berlusconi could no longer count on a majority in Parliament, the end of his government and the installation of its replacement happened very quickly. With stocks on the Milan exchange falling, the spread between Italian and German bonds growing, and European leaders (in particular Chancellor Merkel) urging Napolitano to take action,⁷ the president appointed Monti to the position of Life Senator on 9 November. At the time, Monti was president of the elite, private Bocconi University in Milan and European chairman of the Trilateral Commission. He had previously acted as an international adviser to Goldman Sachs, had been a member of the advisory board of the Coca-Cola Company, and had sat on the Senior European Advisory Council of Moody's rating agency. From 1995 to 2004, he had served as a European commissioner, first for Internal Market, Financial Services and Taxation (1995–1999) and then for Competition (1999–2004). Monti's nomination was seen as ratcheting up the pressure on Berlusconi a further notch before his expected resignation and paving the way for the new Life Senator to form a government thereafter.

Splits in both the center-right and center-left alliances immediately appeared, with the LN and Italia dei Valori (IdV, Italy of Values) expressing their opposition to such a solution, preferring new elections. While the PdL was internally divided about the idea of a Montiled government, Berlusconi accepted its "inevitability."⁸ This also reflected the fact that it enjoyed strong support, not only from a wide range of key actors within Italy (including the PD, UdC, Confindustria, and, of course, Napolitano) but, crucially, from those outside the country, in particular, the EU institutions, other member state governments, and the markets.⁹ The extent to which these actors felt that they could speak out on Italian politics was exemplified by Herman Van Rompuy, president of the European Council, when he informed the audience in a speech at the European University Institute in Florence on 11 November that Italy "needs reforms, not elections," with a strong vote on the stability package being "what the markets expect. And what the rest of Europe expects."¹⁰

Berlusconi resigned on 12 November following the successful vote in Parliament on the stability package, and the next day Monti accepted Napolitano's invitation to form a new government. The main issue remaining to be resolved was how many, and which, party representatives might be given ministerial posts in the new government. While initially it seemed that the PdL and the PD would have at least one representative each in the Cabinet, on 16 November Monti

announced: "During the negotiations, I have reached the conclusion that the absence of politicians in the government will help it."¹¹ This reflected the fact that although they had squabbled over who their respective ministers might be, in reality, as Carlo Fusaro says in his chapter, "the two main parties were convinced that it would suit them better not to be directly involved in the government and to keep their hands free." Monti added that he would not consider the entry of party politicians into his government at any future stage and that he would require the remaining 18 months of the legislature to tackle the problems facing Italy.¹² On 17 and 18 November, less than a week after Berlusconi's resignation, the new government received the support of both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, with only the LN voting against. By an overwhelming majority, nearly all of Italy's parliamentary parties approved an executive mostly composed of university professors and senior civil servants and without a single party member or elected representative.

Italy was not the only EU member state to change its government in November 2011. The Cannes G20 summit at the start of the month not only had marked the beginning of the end for Berlusconi, but also had effectively called time on George Papandreu, who resigned as Greece's prime minister on 10 November. In fact, all five countries of the unflattering PIIGS acronym—Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece, and Spain—saw new governments take office during 2011. In three (Ireland, Spain, and Portugal), they were the products of elections, with the main incumbent parties all suffering heavy defeats. In Italy and Greece, governmental change took place without elections. Nonetheless, while the events of November 2011 in the two countries may appear similar at first sight, there are important differences. In Greece, the former vice-president of the ECB, Lucas Papademos, became prime minister of a cabinet composed mostly of representatives from the two largest parties: PASOK and New Democracy (12 of 18 cabinet members had been PASOK ministers in the previous government). The new prime minister's remit was primarily to steer the country through a second controversial bailout ratification and up to early elections in the first half of 2012. His can therefore be seen as a grand coalition "national unity" caretaker government, led by a technocrat.

In Italy, the situation is very different. Monti's government is neither a caretaker nor a grand coalition. Rather, his is a technocratic government that enjoys considerable cross-partisan support but contains no party representatives and has been put in place to introduce a range of major reforms over the course of an 18-month period. Indeed, should the Monti government survive until at least 17 March 2013, it will become the second-longest serving technocratic government

in post-war democratic Europe, surpassed only by Lyuben Berov's administration in transition-era Bulgaria between December 1992 and September 1994 (which, unlike Monti's Cabinet, however, did contain a handful of party representatives).¹³

Technocratic governments are uncommon in post-war Europe, with those lasting longer than a few months and entirely excluding party representatives being extremely rare. In fact, if we look at the composition and duration of governments in Europe over the past decades, we see that the two standout examples of fully non-party technocratic governments in post-war established European democracies are both in Italy: Lamberto Dini's administration from January 1995 to May 1996 and the current Monti government.¹⁴ These appear almost as bookends of the Italian Second Republic, with the new parties and politicians that were unable to govern the country in the mid-1990s proving again—after numerous mergers, splits, and name changes—incapable of doing so almost two decades later. They are parties that, as Ceccarini, Diamanti, and Lazar argue in their chapter, have agreed on a “ceasefire government” following the implosion of the governing majority and the lack of a cohesive opposition capable of credibly replacing it. Indeed, Fusaro rightly suggests that the Italian party system risks being seen as having declared bankruptcy.

One could of course argue that this is a superficial analysis and that the only real difference between the new government in Italy and those in Ireland, Portugal, or Spain is that, in the last three cases, parties have been able to “keep up appearances.” In other words, one could contend that it makes little difference who governs in any of these countries, since the narrow lines within which they can act are drawn elsewhere (and these actions are closely monitored by the International Monetary Fund and the ECB).¹⁵ These states have at least in part become—to use a paradoxical but suggestive term—“democracies without choices,” as Ivan Krastev said of those in the Balkans a decade ago.¹⁶ Nonetheless, the suspension of party government in Italy (for the second time in 20 years) and the willingness with which almost all parties in Parliament have accepted this does appear significant.

Reflecting in 2009 on what contemporary parties can do when in government, Peter Mair argued that the main characteristics of party government could be summarized under the headings “responsiveness,” “accountability,” and “responsibility,” with parties over time having increasingly favored responsibility over responsiveness.¹⁷ For Mair, “responsiveness” means that political leaders and governments must consider and respond to public demands, “accountability” signifies that politicians are being held to account for their actions in government (as

William H. Riker put it, the public can “throw the rascals out” at the next general election), and responsibility “involves an acceptance that, in certain areas and in certain procedures, the leaders’ hands will be tied” due to external constraints, that governments “are expected to act prudently and consistently,” and that they must live up to commitments and agreements “with other governments and institutions.”¹⁸

What has happened in Italy underlines the importance of “responsibility” in Europe: here, the parties did not see themselves and, crucially, were not seen by others in the EU as capable of producing a stable government—whether an immediate grand coalition or a new majority following elections—that could introduce the reforms now being demanded, many of which had been promised at various times during the past decade by both the center-right and center-left coalitions. Since they were unable to be responsible, the parties could not remain in government. Consequently, Italy in 2012 has a non-party government that can *only* be responsible. Given that the Monti executive (a) has not presented itself to the electorate with a program for government; (b) contains no parliamentarians or party representatives; and (c) has said it will not seek re-election after its term in office is over, by definition it cannot be either responsive or accountable. Rather—and especially given the circumstances by which it came into power—its mandate is to be first and foremost responsible.

The parties, of course, have not gone away. Nor have they lost all their power. Although Berlusconi has taken a back seat in the initial months following his resignation, party representatives remain prominent on Italian television screens and in Italian newspapers. They are still in government in cities and regions all across the country. And they can bring the Monti government down with a parliamentary no confidence motion whenever they like. Indeed, from one perspective, the technocratic government serves a useful function for the parties: it can introduce painful measures and take most of the blame for them, allowing the parties to be seen at one remove or acting as “modifiers” of those elements affecting their core voters. Once the technocratic government has served its purpose, the parties can then return. However, this may be a dangerous game. Although it is too early to say what the long-term effects of this latest suspension of party government will be, so far the data from opinion polls are very clear. Party identification is declining, and trust in the parties as a whole is extremely low. At the time of writing in early 2012, almost half of respondents in different opinion polls said that they were either undecided or not planning to vote,¹⁹ while only 30 percent in an Ipsos survey in late January 2012 said that they were committed to voting for a particular party.²⁰ More strikingly, in a Demos survey published in early January 2012, only

3.9 percent expressed “faith” in the parties and 8.9 percent in Parliament.²¹ An ISPO/*Corriere della Sera* survey at the beginning of February 2012 produced similar results, with 91 percent of respondents saying they had “little” or “very little” faith in political parties.²²

Not only do the parties seem to have lost the support and trust of citizens, but the political party itself is now seen as less relevant to the government and to democracy. In a survey in late February 2012, only 27 percent said they would like a party politician to be prime minister after Monti while, in the Demos survey cited above, 47.9 percent of respondents agreed with the statement “democracy can function without political parties.”²³ These figures suggest that it is not just the current parties that are in crisis, but also public acceptance (not to mention appreciation) of the party’s fundamental role in democracy. Having abandoned the party on the ground in favor of the party in the state, the mass party in favor of the personal one, and now the responsibilities of party government in favor of support for (or opposition to) a technocratic administration, the Italian national political class finds itself in early 2012 restricted to a sort of Indian reservation in Parliament. It is a political class that appears bankrupt from many points of view: support, trust, integrity, policies, leadership, and international credibility. And whether it is capable of genuine innovation and renewal (beyond perhaps yet another round of rebranding) remains very much in doubt.

The Game Changers: Giorgio Napolitano and Mario Monti

As we have seen, Monti’s appointment followed the government’s loss of its parliamentary majority and the patent inability (and unwillingness) of the main opposition parties to replace it. Berlusconi’s resignation and the installation of a technocratic government thus laid bare the extremely weak state of Italy’s parties. In their chapter, Ceccarini, Diamanti, and Lazar show how 2011 hastened the crumbling of the party system, a process whose roots lay in the demise of bipolarity, the conflicts that have torn parties and coalitions apart, the wearing out of the personal party model, and the rise of anti-party sentiment among the public. What is important to note here is that the downgrade of Italian parties—above and beyond the fall of the government—concerns not just the former PdL-LN coalition, but all of Italy’s parties. The divisions and uncertainties within the center-right were plain for all to see in 2011, but so too were those on the center-left. Indeed, as we write in early 2012, the differences between the PD and its potential allies as regards key policies, leadership, preferred electoral system,

and coalition strategies remain unresolved. With just over a year at most to go until the general election, the possible members of a new center-left coalition are still, as one opinion columnist only slightly simplistically summed it up, “divided on everything.”²⁴

The year 2011 also saw the parties fuel even further the climate of hyper-partisanship, marked by heightened rivalry and head-on conflict. In Parliament, in institutional relationships, on talk shows, and in Italy’s piazzas, party representatives attacked their opponents with a level of aggression that reinforced the standoff and made communication (not to mention cooperation) between government and opposition impossible. Napolitano criticized this fiery and damaging climate on several occasions over the course of the year and repeatedly called on the parties to tone it down in the interests of the country. For example, in the Emile Noël lecture at the New York University School of Law on 29 March 2011, Napolitano observed that “the biggest problem for Italian politics is the hyper-partisanship that creates a daily guerrilla [war] by making the dialogue impossible and establishing a mutual delegitimization of the political opponents. Italy lives a situation where nobody listens to one another and the risks of serious divisions and strong weakening of the Country are widening.”²⁵

When faced in November 2011 with parties seemingly willing and able only to pose vetoes rather than govern or face new elections, it was Napolitano who intervened to change the political game by nominating a figure from beyond the party world. The choice of Monti can be seen as the president’s innovative (and constitutionally legitimate) exit strategy from a political and parliamentary impasse that was posing a serious threat to the country. As Napolitano himself later put it, what happened was an unusual move away from “the usual, but distorted, dialectic.”²⁶ This, he added, was dictated by the need for “unconventional governing solutions. And grand coalition or national unity governments, whether ceasefire or transitional ones, are resources that democratic political systems need to be able to count on—and have counted on—in moments of gridlock when there is no easy solution available.”²⁷

While the president’s “unconventional” solution avoided a general election that would have produced a bitter conflict at a time when Italy was facing an extremely serious financial crisis, it also spared the main parties an election that none of them wanted. Certainly, the PdL did not want to face an election, given its drop in support; nor did the LN, which welcomed the chance to establish some distance from its time in government with the PdL and to assume the role of main parliamentary opposition; nor the PD, which was still divided and in doubt about its leadership, alliances, and policies; nor the third pole,

which certainly did not wish to face a vote under the existing electoral law.²⁸ Saving the parties from an election was, of course, a secondary effect of Napolitano's actions in late 2011, which were focused on piloting Italy through the financial crisis and regaining its international credibility. In the month between mid-October and mid-November, it was Napolitano who acted as interlocutor with European leaders, who conducted initial exploratory talks with the main parties, who guaranteed Berlusconi's resignation when this seemed for a moment in doubt. And it was Napolitano who nominated Monti as a Life Senator and then invited him to form a government. In other words, it was Napolitano who took the initiative in this period, stepping into the gap created by the weakness of the parties and enabling the Monti government to take office quickly and with the support of all the parties apart from the LN.

This outcome was by no means a foregone conclusion, however. If Napolitano was able to change the political game, it was not just because he acted in line with the Constitution, but because—as Caccarini, Diamanti, and Lazar underline—he was the only institutional figure widely trusted by the public. This trust was built on the guiding role that he had played in compensating for what Fusaro in his chapter terms “the representative and governmental vacuum created by parties enjoying increasingly less legitimacy.” It was further enhanced by the position that Napolitano assumed in defense of the nation, not only during the financial crisis, but throughout the celebrations marking 150 years of Italian unification. As John Foot and Samantha Owen highlight in their chapter, these events allowed the president to play a central role in which he was very much identified with Italy itself at a time when the country was facing a serious threat.

In contrast to the parties, Napolitano thus possessed a wealth of credibility that he was then able to confer on Monti and the new government. As we know, Monti was summoned to resolve Italy's economic problems, not its party political ones. Nonetheless, his appointment and the way in which he has carried out his role to date constitute both an opportunity and a challenge for the parties. Like Napolitano, Monti has also changed the political game by behaving very differently from his predecessors, and this in itself poses a dilemma for the parties: do they learn from Monti's example, or do they choose to ignore it and carry on as before? This is especially relevant since the evidence at the time of writing (February 2012) is that, so far at least, the public likes the new Cabinet's approach to governing. Various surveys have shown that, despite the introduction of tough measures to increase taxes and extend the retirement age, over half of Italians trust Monti and his administration.²⁹ Moreover, while expressing high levels of trust in

both Napolitano (78 percent) and Monti (58 percent), respondents are deeply dissatisfied with the parties and the ways in which they practice politics (56 percent).³⁰

Monti can be considered a “game changer” not only because of how he behaves as prime minister and the style of government that he espouses, but also because he urges and constrains the parties to modify how they interact with one another. His first major innovation has been to refocus the political agenda on the problems of the country, with the program for the government based largely on introducing measures to ensure the sustainability of the public debt alongside a series of modernizing reforms. While the time frame for achieving this may be limited, the problems of the country will at least not have to compete for attention with those of the prime minister. This of course had been the case throughout Berlusconi’s years in power, with the gap between his interests and the concerns of ordinary citizens reaching new heights in 2011 (and presumably contributing to his loss of popularity). Indeed, it seems fair to hypothesize that the new government’s initial high poll ratings—notwithstanding its unpopular measures—are due at least in part to the “national” rather than “personal” character of its actions. The shift of emphasis to the priorities of the country is also reflected in the willingness and ability to make decisions quickly rather than allowing problems to fester. Monti himself pointed this out very clearly during his appearance at the Budget and Finance Commissions of the Chamber of Deputies in December when he told those present: “It’s true that it did not require professors to devise this budget. Absolutely true. But I wonder then why you did not do it before ... You called on us because you were paralyzed by mutual vetoes. I hope you will start to look to the future.”³¹

The second major change in the new political game is the priority given to expertise in government, reflected in the links between the backgrounds of ministers and their portfolios. As Fusaro’s chapter details, starting with Monti himself, the new Cabinet is made up of experienced academics, high-ranking civil servants, and CEOs who have been handed ministries in line with their skills. This of course contrasts strongly with the previous Berlusconi government in which the strength of ministers’ relationships with the prime minister and their perceived political loyalty appeared to be key factors in Cabinet appointments. Moreover, the importance of governmental competence is also reflected in how ministers tackle issues; currently, there are clear periods of study and consultation during which “pre-announcements” are deliberately kept to a minimum. In a television interview in early January 2012, Monti commented on this change, noting that previous Italian governments had too often sought to “provide

immediate answers to any question. But serious policies sometimes require periods of reflection lasting longer than just a few seconds.”³²

The third innovation introduced by Monti is his communication style, in terms of both content and method. As regards the former, this tends to concern policies that have been—or are about to be—implemented. While he makes little mention of his supporters and opponents in Parliament, he does defend the parties as a whole, acknowledging their role and praising them for their sense of responsibility toward the government. However, the major communication change has been in how Monti communicates with the public compared to his predecessor. Berlusconi generally used interviews with friendly journalists on shows whose content and format had been agreed upon in advance, video messages to his supporters that were repeated fully or in part on television, and telephone calls to live current affairs programs. Monti instead has chosen to communicate with the citizenry mainly through long television interviews in which he is the sole guest and thus has time and space to explain the government’s actions clearly, in detail, and at times with a dose of humor.³³

The fourth change to the rules of the game is the image of sobriety and integrity projected by Monti and his ministers. There are numerous examples of this: Monti’s decision to forfeit his salary and, like European commissioners, to publish a full disclosure of his assets and those of his wife on the government’s Web site; the obligation for ministers to make a similar online declaration of assets; and the rapid resolution of any possible conflicts of interest, such as Minister Corrado Passera’s sale of his shares in Intesa Sanpaolo bank and the resignation of Undersecretary Carlo Malinconico after revelations that he had accepted holidays paid for by a construction boss.

Last, but by no means least, among the changes to the practice of government is the toning down of political debate. The creation of Forza Italia (FI) in the early 1990s had heralded an intensification of inter-party conflict—something that would become a fixed characteristic of the Second Republic, with the center-left and center-right divided into anti-Berlusconi and anti-communist camps.³⁴ The easing of tensions between the two main parties that has occurred since Monti took office is therefore an important and positive development. As Napolitano commented at the end of 2011, these relationships were now taking place in a “more relaxed climate ... safe from the pathological exasperation of the conflict between government, parliamentary majority, and opposition.”³⁵

This new climate is due to various factors. First, it derives from the wide parliamentary majority enjoyed by the government, which

Monti has termed a “large non-coalition.”³⁶ Given that they are both supporting the technocratic executive (albeit with different degrees of conviction), the PdL and PD have had to put to one side the strongly adversarial and aggressive politics that previously characterized their relations. Moreover, since the situation regarding their future electoral alliances remains extremely unclear, neither of the two parties can risk excessive conflict with their former partners—the LN in the case of the PdL and the IdV in that of the PD. Second, the cooling down of tensions between the main parties also reflects the lack of alternatives. Put simply, it is not in their interests to be squabbling and name calling, given the financial crisis, the strong sense of impending danger if action is not quickly taken, the painful measures launched, and the declining levels of trust in—and identification with—the parties. Finally, the roles played by both Monti and Napolitano in encouraging political debate to remain more civil are again crucial here, with the prime minister frequently highlighting the importance of mutual “disarmament” and praising the sense of responsibility displayed by the parties supporting his government.

The end of 2011 has thus been a time of major changes in Italian politics. Monti has overseen the imposition of a policy agenda focused on the problems of the country, the clear explanations of decisions to citizens, the reduction of tensions in political debate, and the injection of integrity and competence into government. In turn, Monti’s presence as prime minister is the result of Napolitano’s “unconventional solution” in November to the crisis of Italy’s finances and parties. For this reason, we can think of both Monti and Napolitano as “game changers”: *super partes* figures who moved beyond the parties to transform the political game. In these initial months of the new government’s time in office, the majority of Italians have expressed strong support for these changes. Whether the parties will be willing and able to respond to the challenges posed by the new rules of the game remains very much an open question.

Notes

1. See the Ipsos/RAI-Ballarò survey (conducted on 20 February 2012), "Politici e tecnici davanti ad un paese in recessione," http://sondaggi-politicoelettorali.it/asp/visualizza_sondaggio.asp?idsondaggio=5233.
2. This, at least, is still the case as we write in late February 2012.
3. The internal problems referred to by Berlusconi were disputes with Fini, which finally saw Fini and his supporters leave the party in the summer of 2010. See C. Fotina and M. Mobili, "Sulla crescita solo un piccolo passo," *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 10 February 2011.
4. The "responsible" group of MPs consisted of those who had left other parties to provide vital support for the Berlusconi government in Parliament following the departure of Fini and his supporters from the PdL.
5. See R. Turno, "Parlamento ormai bloccato: Da settembre 4 leggi," *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 2 November 2011; Centre for the Study of Political Change, *VI Rapporto sul governo italiano*, <http://www.circap.unisi.it>.
6. "In God's Name, Go!" *Financial Times*, 4 November 2011, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/9c118294-06fc-11e1-90de-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2MgTkP0r9>.
7. M. Walker, C. Forelle, and S. Meichtry, "Deepening Crisis over Euro Pits Leader against Leader," *Wall Street Journal*, 30 December 2011.
8. "Monti, Berlusconi ci pensa," 10 November 2011, http://www.repubblica.it/politica/2011/11/10/news/pietro_monti-24765195/.
9. Ibid.
10. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z5f-CRlfdM#t=0m55s>. The video is made available by Collettivo Prezzemolo, which recorded the protests against technocracy and the lack of democracy in Europe during Van Rompuy's speech at the European University Institute on 11 November 2011.
11. "Per Monti un governo senza politici," 16 November 2011, <http://www.lastampa.it/2011/11/16/italia/politica/per-monti-un-governo-senza-politici-forti-anche-cosi-ora-avanti-di-corsa-passera-super-ministro-tre-le-donne-j5aJ9VFM2ltZ7zJ4K4X3bN/pagina.html>.
12. "Il governo Monti subito al lavoro," 16 November 2011, http://www.ilmessaggero.it/primopiano/politica/il_governo_monti_subito_al_lavoro_adesso_sar_tutta_una_corsa_video/notizie/170120.shtml.
13. See J. D. Bell, "Democratization and Political Participation in 'Postcommunist' Bulgaria," in *Politics, Power and the Struggle for Democracy in South-East Europe*, ed. K. Dawisha and B. Parrott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 353–402, here 383.
14. See, for example, the government composition data available at <http://parl.gov.org/stable/data.html> and <http://www.kolumbus.fi/taglarsson/dokumentit/governm2.htm>.
15. On this point and on the general difficulties now facing national governments in Europe, see C. Froio and P. C. Gattinara, "Se a decidere è la tecnocrazia," *L'Espresso*, <http://espresso.repubblica.it/dettaglio/se-a-decidere-e-la-tecnocrazia/2175396/0>, 27 February 2012.

16. I. Krastev, "The Balkans: Democracies without Choices," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 3 (2002): 39–53.
17. P. Mair, "Representative versus Responsible Government," Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies Working Paper 09/8, September 2009, <http://www.mpifg.de/pu/workpap/wp09-8.pdf>.
18. *Ibid.*, 12.
19. See, for example, the surveys by ISPO/*Corriere della Sera* (conducted between 16 and 18 January 2012), "Liberalizzazioni, d'accordo 6 italiani su 10," http://sondaggipoliticoelettorali.it/asp/visualizza_sondaggio.asp?idsondaggio=5159, and by Ipsos/RAI–Ballarò (conducted on 13 February 2012), "I cento giorni di cura Monti," http://sondaggipoliticoelettorali.it/asp/visualizza_sondaggio.asp?idsondaggio=5221.
20. See the Ipsos/RAI–Ballarò survey (conducted on 23 January 2012), "Italia liberalizzata, paese bloccato," http://sondaggipoliticoelettorali.it/asp/visualizza_sondaggio.asp?idsondaggio=5171.
21. F. Bordignon, "Se la democrazia fa a meno dei partiti," *La Repubblica*, 9 January 2012.
22. See the ISPO/*Corriere della Sera* survey (conducted on 1–2 February 2012), "Fiducia nei partiti, dopo il caso Lusi giù all'8% e il 56% degli elettori vuole cambiamenti radicali," http://sondaggipoliticoelettorali.it/asp/visualizza_sondaggio.asp?idsondaggio=5193.
23. See the Ipsos/RAI–Ballarò survey (conducted on 20 February 2012), "Politici e tecnici davanti ad un paese in recessione," http://sondaggipoliticoelettorali.it/asp/visualizza_sondaggio.asp?idsondaggio=5233; Bordignon, "Se la democrazia fa a meno dei partiti."
24. A. Polito, "La sinistra di governo è divisa su tutto," *Corriere della Sera*, 9 October 2011.
25. See L. Delbello, "The President Talks about His Italy," *i-Italy*, 1 April 2011, <http://www.i-italy.org/17033/president-talks-about-his-italy>.
26. See Napolitano's speech to institutional, political, and civil society representatives on 20 December 2011, <http://www.quirinale.it/elementi/Continua.aspx?tipo=Discorso&key=2334>.
27. *Ibid.*
28. See I. Diamanti, "Aspettando le elezioni nel deserto dei Tartari," *La Repubblica*, 26 September 2011.
29. See, for example, the following surveys: Ipsos/RAI–Ballarò (conducted on 6 February 2012), "Posto fisso, emergenza neve e finanziamento pubblico ai partiti," http://sondaggipoliticoelettorali.it/asp/visualizza_sondaggio.asp?idsondaggio=5204; ISPO/*Corriere della Sera* survey (conducted on 1–2 February 2012), "Fiducia nei partiti, dopo il caso Lusi giù all'8% e il 56% degli elettori vuole cambiamenti radicali," http://sondaggipoliticoelettorali.it/asp/visualizza_sondaggio.asp?idsondaggio=5193; IPR/RAI–TG3 (conducted on 3 February 2012), "Attualità politica: La fiducia in Mario Monti," http://sondaggipoliticoelettorali.it/asp/visualizza_sondaggio.asp?idsondaggio=5192.
30. See the ISPO/*Corriere della Sera* survey (conducted on 1–2 February 2012), "Fiducia nei partiti, dopo il caso Lusi giù all'8% e il 56% degli elettori vuole

- cambiamenti radicali,” http://sondaggipoliticoelettorali.it/asp/visualizza_sondaggio.asp?idsondaggio=5193.
31. M. Galluzzo, “Monti: Fisco amico, non repressivo. Non pagheranno i soliti noti,” *Corriere della Sera*, 14 December 2011.
 32. Interview with Monti during the RAI 3 television program *Che tempo che fa*, 8 January 2012, <http://www.rai.tv/dl/RaiTV/programmi/media/ContentItem-651a7766-5726-410a-a305-6f1b4184c376.html#p=>.
 33. See “A Monti piace il talk facile,” *Lettera*, 14 February 2012, <http://www.lettera43.it:80/politica/39834/a-monti-piace-il-talk-facile.htm>.
 34. See the chapter by Ceccarini, Diamanti, and Lazar in this volume. See also L. Morlino, “Crisis of Parties and Change of Party Systems in Italy,” *Party Politics* 2, no. 1 (1996): 5–30.
 35. See Napolitano’s speech to institutional, political and civil society representatives on 20 December 2011 at <http://www.quirinale.it/elementi/Continua.aspx?tipo=Discorso&key=2334>.
 36. L. Maisano, “Il professore convince la City,” *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 19 January 2012.