On Saturday, 20 April 2013, Italy’s outgoing president, Giorgio Napolitano, was re-elected as president of the Republic, marking the first time that a president had ever been re-elected. The aim was to resolve the political stalemate that had emerged because of the broadly tripolar split with no clear winners produced by the political elections of 24–25 February. In this exceptional situation, which was close to being nothing short of a regime crisis from a historical and constitutional point of view, Napolitano’s re-election was considered the only way to resolve two political dilemmas. The first concerned the election of a personality of prestige to the presidency. The country desperately needed someone who would be able to bring Parliament together and would be capable of carrying out the role of system stabilizer, promoter, defender, and guardian of the institutions and of the political and governmental process—that is, a leader who would make full use of all the powers and functions set out in Article 87 of the Constitution, as Napolitano had done during his previous seven-year term, particularly toward the end. Napolitano’s re-election also provided the basic premise for a concrete solution for the second dilemma: the formation of a new government. The majority that was to elect the new president would be the same majority that would enable a new government to be born.

Given the complexity of the events that were to lead to the re-election of President Napolitano, the first section of this chapter will provide a
summary of the background, while the second section will analyze
the presidential election, the manner in which it was conducted, and
the outcome. Finally, in the last section there will be an assessment of
Napolitano’s presidency, of his role in the Italian political order, and of
the legacy that he will leave behind.

The Background

The situation that led to the re-election of President Napolitano was
the political stalemate resulting from the general elections held in
February. A set of extraordinary circumstances had led to these elec-
tions, starting with the formation of Mario Monti’s “technocratic”
government in November 2011. The Monti government, which took
office with the anomalous support of both the center-left and center-
right, had been tasked with carrying out important systemic reforms,
from the stabilization of public finances to the reform of the pension
system. At the same time, the majority that supported the government
was to take responsibility in Parliament (to no avail, as we shall see)
for reforms to the political system, ranging from a law on the political
parties to a new electoral law, which were both long expected and
much desired by the general public.

The premature end of the Monti government’s term in office\(^1\) and
the prime minister’s forlorn hope that he would be able to enjoy the
electoral fruits of the positive results that had been achieved during
that time led to the creation of a new political party, Civic Choice with
Monti for Italy (SC, Scelta Civica con Monti per l’Italia). In a coalition
with other center parties, the SC won only a 10.54 percent share of the
votes (i.e., 3,591,629 votes) in the February elections. These outcomes
are an indication of the overall state of uncertainty, weakness, and
meltdown of the political system, just three months before the election
of the new president of the Republic.

In fact, what has been called the “tormented start to the 17th Leg-
islature”\(^2\) witnessed a party-political picture that in substance had a
tripolar character. This involved the two parties that have made up
the bipolar Italian system since 2007–2008: the Democratic Party (PD,
Partito Democratico), which won the majority bonus in the Chamber
as a result of being the largest national party, and the People of Free-
dom (PdL, Popolo delle Libertà).\(^3\) In addition, there was a third party
(whch prefers to call itself a “non-party”), the Five Star Movement
(M5S, Movimento 5 Stelle), led by the comic actor Beppe Grillo, who
was making his debut in a national political election and who man-
aged to obtain 25.55 percent of the votes.\(^4\)
With an abstention rate of 52 percent and three large political parties with broadly similar degrees of support, there was a situation of political impasse. While the PD had a clear majority in the Chamber, thanks to the national bonus provided by the Calderoli law (Law No. 270/2005), the same could not be said of the Senate, where the combination of the regional bonuses did not permit the PD to have a majority. Instead, there were three groups, each politically opposed to the other two, as well as the presence of a fourth party, the SC, which was too weak to be able to swing the balance and to allow a government to be formed with a majority that would be homogeneous with the majority in the Chamber.

So what could be done? On the one hand, it was impossible to proceed to the formation of a minority government, given that Article 94 of the Italian Constitution requires that there be initially explicit parliamentary support in both chambers. On the other hand, with the parties ruling out any moves toward a formula that could lead to a “technical” government similar to the one led by Monti, there were only two ways forward for the PD, the largest party in the country. It could attempt to come to an agreement with the M5S for a “government of change,” along the lines suggested by the PD’s secretary, Pier Luigi Bersani. Alternatively, it could try to form a “grand coalition,” albeit an awkward one, with the same parties that had sustained the Monti government until December 2012, but had put themselves forward in opposition to one another in the February elections. After the far from straightforward election of the presidents of the two chambers, which was the first duty of the new Parliament, consultations with the president of the Republic (who was in the final weeks of his term) led to the preliminary mandate being given to Bersani. This set in motion the process to bring about the formation of a new government.

The immediate and steadfast refusal of the M5S representatives to sustain, even with “external support” (one measure at a time), any government not led by them showed that the path of collaboration between the PD and M5S was closed. This was dramatically made clear in a meeting between the heads of the M5S parliamentary groups and the newly appointed Bersani that was streamed live, as the M5S had demanded. The M5S’s unwillingness to consider any agreement was accompanied by the alternative they put forward, which became known as the “Belgian way” in reference to the events that took place in Belgium following the 2009 elections. This model would leave the outgoing government in power to deal with current matters and, at the same time, allow the parliamentary chambers, without even setting up parliamentary committees, to approve both a new electoral law and a constitutional reform to reduce the number of members of Parliament.
On this basis, there would then soon be new elections, without forming any government or really “starting up” a new legislature.

Once the prospect of collaboration with the M5S was dismissed, the exploratory mandate handed to Bersani could go no further and was destined to fail. It was then “frozen” by President Napolitano, who began a new round of talks in a bid to determine if there was any possibility of a “broadly based” government that could retain the support of the same majority as in the previous Monti government (i.e., the PD, PdL, and SC). However, this time it would be a truly political government, that is, made up of and led by figures representing their own parties rather than a technocratic government.

While the party-political system was becoming embroiled in a series of closed meetings, the president of the Republic was exploring the political conditions for this second hypothesis. To pave the way for creating the conditions for such an agreement between alternative political forces on a political program, on 30 March Napolitano appointed a committee consisting of experts and politicians. These were set the task of focusing on solutions, with regard to institutional and socio-economic matters as well as relations with the EU, which might bring the different political forces together to tackle urgent issues. By laying the foundations for a program of the “forthcoming government,” President Napolitano was also attempting to “inform the work” of the next president of the Republic, almost as a bequest, as he was later to confirm.

The committee, known as the “wisemen” by the newspapers, produced two reports that were delivered to the head of state on 12 April. The president declared: “They will be part of what I hand over to the new president of the Republic, as well as something for me to take personal, further stock of in the coming days.” In effect, these reports strongly anticipated the program that the new prime minister, Enrico Letta, presented to Parliament three weeks later to seek the support of the two chambers. Some of those who had been members of the committee of experts were to become ministers of Letta’s government.

From that moment onward, the Italian political scene moved into an intense and swirling spiral from which it would emerge only after the first domino of the political-institutional game—that is, the election of the new president of the Republic—was played.

The Election: Its Implementation and Form

On 3 April 2013, the president of the Chamber called an ordinary sitting of Parliament, with the regional delegates also in attendance, and on 18 April the election of the new president of the Republic was on
the agenda. The ordinary session of Parliament consisted of 1,007 “big electors”: 630 deputies, 315 senators, 4 life senators (one by right, the ex-president Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, and three appointed by the president: Giulio Andreotti, Emilio Colombo, and Monti), and 58 delegates elected by the regional councils. From a political point of view, the electoral college was composed of 495 center-left members (with 430 from the PD and 46 from Left Ecology and Freedom [SEL, Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà]); 270 from the center-right coalition (with 211 from the PdL and 40 from the Northern League [LN, Lega Nord]; 162 from the M5S; and 69 from the coalition of center groups (around the SC). For the election of the president, the Constitution requires a two-thirds majority in the first three rounds of votes, equivalent to 672 votes in 2013, and a simple majority, that is, 504 votes, from the fourth round onward.

In theory, before the vote took place, there were two possible scenarios. In the first, a president could be agreed on by the PD, PdL, and SC, suggesting the prospect of an agreement between the center-left (or most of it) and the center-right (or part of it), with the possible formation of an executive based on a “grand coalition,” somehow excluding the “extreme” wings of the two main coalitions (the LN and SEL). The second possibility was a president elected on the basis of an agreement between the center-left and the M5S. The political consequences of both hypotheses appeared hard to assess. Each of them, no doubt, would lead to very strong tensions within the PD.

Every big elector was well aware that, more than on previous occasions, the election of the president would also “contain” within it a possible way forward for the formation of a government. It was hard to imagine that the majority electing the new president would not be the same majority that would enable a new government to come into being. Although there were three other cases in the history of the Italian Constitution where the election of the president of the Republic took place immediately after political elections and before the process leading to the formation of a government (in 1948, 1992, and 2006), the dramatic nature of the electoral stalemate in 2013 made it quite unique, and the solution for the election of the president would leave no alternatives.

It was in this context that the M5S’s so-called Quirinarie took place on 9 April. This Internet-based poll to choose the Movement’s candidate for the president of the Republic was set up—so it was said—to give clear guidance to its big electors. Open only to members of the party, it would involve two rounds of voting. In the first round, the members themselves could nominate candidates for the president of the Republic; in the second, they could choose one from a list of 10 names proposed by the majority of those who had cast a vote. At the end of the
process, as announced on 16 April, the M5S members expressed their preference for the jurist Stefano Rodotà, who had previously been an independent left MP elected in the lists of the Italian Communist Party (PCI, Partito Comunista Italiano) about 35 years ago.\(^{10}\)

Just before the first round of voting in the Chamber and over the course of the following days, there was real drama within the PD. The party was split between the option of supporting a candidate only with other center-left parties (with a possible opening toward an agreed-upon line with the M5S, which some hoped might herald a renewed attempt at Bersani’s solution) and the other option of supporting a candidate alongside the moderate parties, which might lead to a very different type of government majority. The divisions within the party, which were the result of markedly different political strategies, were reflected in the choice of candidates for the presidency. This was not absolutely unprecedented, but it was particularly striking in this instance. When asked about the possibility of being re-elected in an interview given to *La Stampa*, President Napolitano reaffirmed his unwillingness on the grounds of both normal practice and age-related issues.\(^{11}\)

In the PD, which was fully aware of its own pivotal role in the presidential election, various “souls” were looking for the best position to take vis-à-vis future prospects and were thus deciding which presidential candidate to support. The mayor of Florence, Matteo Renzi, at that time the leader of a minority within the party, challenged the traditional line of keeping quiet about choices to be made and strategies to adopt by making his own position public via a letter published in the newspaper *La Repubblica*.\(^{12}\) He declared himself to be against the election of one of the candidates being considered, Franco Marini, a member of the PD and an ex-president of the Senate. In spite of all the fuss it stirred up, Renzi’s “no” did not prevent an agreement being reached by the PD, PdL, and SC on 17 April to support Marini in the elections for the Quirinal Palace. Nor was the agreement prevented by the uncertain outcome of the preliminary meeting of the big center-left electors. However, in an open ballot Marini obtained only 222 votes from the 495 big electors. So when it came to the first round of voting on 18 April, he received the support of only 521 big electors—that is, 200 fewer than the total of those political parties that had reached an agreement on his nomination and 151 fewer than the number required to be elected in the first round.\(^{13}\)

It was now obvious that Marini’s candidacy was bound to come to an end since it was unlikely that he could increase his support in the ensuing rounds of voting. In order to come to a new agreement, the parties that had supported Marini’s candidacy were moving toward casting a blank vote to ensure that nobody would be elected in the
second and third rounds of voting (on 18 and 19 April) while they were searching for a new candidate.

It was at this moment that Romano Prodi’s candidacy was first mooted. Prodi was put forward by Bersani in the hope that he would be able to unify the PD. Prodi was the leader who had been responsible for the victories of the center-left alliance against Silvio Berlusconi on two occasions (in 1996 and 2006), and he had helped to form the PD in 2007. It was for this very reason that Prodi’s nomination did not go down well with the PdL, in addition to the fact that it implicitly cleared the way for political prospects that were very different from a broadly based coalition or one based on the majority that had supported the Monti government until December 2012. Bersani’s proposal was well-received by the parliamentary groups without even being put to the vote. It was then immediately put to the center-left coalition to vote on, with the chance that it might be supported by the SC and a few “disobedient” M5S voters (after all, Prodi had been among the 10 people listed in the Movement’s Internet poll). In any event, it was now time for the fourth round of voting, in which a simple majority of 504 votes would be sufficient.

With Prodi receiving only 395 votes on the afternoon of 19 April, the “drama” of the PD took place, during which its founding father and its most well-known figurehead in Italy and abroad was discarded in an unexpected and brutal manner. In the secret ballot, there were no fewer than 101 votes less than those theoretically available within the center-left coalition. The effect was a political earthquake—above all within the PD, but also within the broader political system. It led once more to a stalemate in the negotiations for the election of the president of the Republic. This was effectively Armageddon. There was a crisis within the PD, which held a relative majority, and hopes of finding a suitable candidate for president were fading in the absence of the political conditions needed to make such a choice feasible.

Once again, what could be done? The risk of a political vacuum that might destroy not only politicians but governmental institutions as well seemed very real to many observers. The political actors were fully aware of voters’ growing abstentionism and the strong protest vote recently expressed by the electorate. The Palazzo Montecitorio, the seat of the Chamber of Deputies, was a site where many citizens frequently took part in protests.

For the political forces as a whole (with the exception of the M5S), there seemed to be only one way forward: make President Napolitano go back on his word (literally forcing him to reopen the boxes with his own cards inside). This would mean persuading him to agree to being re-elected, in spite of the fact that he had turned down this
possibility on a number of occasions, despite the numerous appeals that had been made to him over a period of time and from a number of directions.

Events unfolded rapidly during the course of 20 April. From early in the morning, meetings that had been called by the leaders of the main parties and representatives of the regions were held in the Quirinal Palace. According to some reports, a series of “pleas” was made to the president. The Quirinal first released a very harsh statement on the political situation. Then, shortly before the afternoon vote in an ordinary sitting of Parliament, President Napolitano announced the political conditions under which he would agree to stand for re-election. Napolitano stated that he could not “shun his responsibility toward the country,” but that he counted on there being “a similar collective assumption of responsibility.”

Thus, on the morning of 20 April, the fifth round of voting took place. There were over 445 blank papers, confirming the expectation that decisions were forthcoming and ensuring that there would be another round. In fact, at 3 PM on the same day, the sixth round of voting proved to be the decisive one. Napolitano was again elected president of the Republic, obtaining a total of 738 votes out of an electoral college of 997 members present, with 504 being the required number for an absolute majority (i.e., only 48 votes fewer than the number of representatives of political parties that had pledged him their support) (see table 1).

Being elected for a second seven-year term, while unprecedented in Italian history, is not ruled out by any article in the Constitution. In the past, there had been proposals to ban a second mandate, including an appeal to the chambers from President Mario Segni, but these had never been approved.

Once the election was finalized, Napolitano’s message during the investiture became, significantly more so than on previous occasions, a speech to the nation in which, as well as underlining the terms under which he accepted the post, the re-elected president underlined, among other priorities, the importance of electoral reform and constitutional reforms. Using explicit and direct language, he addressed all the political forces, as follows: “Listen carefully: your applause … must not lead to any self-indulgence, and I refer not only to those responsible for the spread of corruption in the various spheres of political life and administration, but also those responsible for so many failures to carry out reforms.” With regard to the latter, Napolitano went on to say: “[I]t is my duty to be frank: if I find myself once again where there are the deaf ears that I have come up against in the past, I will not hesitate to draw out the consequences in front
Table 1 Results of the Votes for the Election of the President of the Republic

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<th>II 18 April</th>
<th>III 19 April</th>
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Source: http://parlamento17.camera.it/61.
of the country.” This was nothing less than a formal withdrawal notice accompanied by a very clear hint to take action or face the consequence—that is, his resignation, which would leave the political forces bare in front of the voters.

Therefore, the issue of reforms emerged as an inescapable prius. It was both a hallmark and, at the same time, the legacy of Napolitano’s first mandate, the priority of priorities to set for the new Parliament at the start of a second, unexpected seven-year term, which had been brought about by an emergency. This paramount matter was underlined by the president throughout the year on a number of occasions and was included in his end-of-year speech to the nation, which he made in front of those representatives of the institutions, political forces, and civil society who had “obliged” him to accept a second mandate.

With the political-institutional impasse overcome, it was only two days later that the process to form a government was “reactivated.” After meetings were held and the doubts concerning the choice between the former prime minister, Giuliano Amato, and Letta were overcome, a solution was found with the appointment of Letta based on a possible majority similar to the one that had backed Monti. Thus, the “broad coalition” government, made up of politicians from the PD, PdL, and SC, was formed. It was sworn in on 28 April, presenting itself the next day to the chambers to receive a vote of confidence.

Within the government’s program, a central place was clearly given to the theme of political and constitutional reforms. This was because the duration of the government, that is, 18 months, was linked to these reforms and because a pathway toward constitutional reform that fit in the same time frame was announced. This featured the setting up of a convention that was to include non-parliamentary experts who “would take as a starting point … the results of the parliamentary activity of the last legislature and the conclusions of the committee of ‘wise-men’ set up by the president of the Republic,” to put into motion the long-awaited reforms on the basis of further guiding acts of Parliament.

In fact, one month later, two parliamentary motions were passed (No. 1-47 in the Senate and No. 1-56 in the Chamber), following which the government drew up a draft constitutional law (Senate Act No. 813), alongside which there was a proposed law to set up a parliamentary Commission for Constitutional Reforms (Senate Act No. 343). The proposed constitutional law, despite being approved in its first three readings, never reached the fourth and definitive reading. This was a result of the political consequences of the vote that led on 27 November to the removal of the PdL’s leader, Berlusconi, from the Senate.

At the conclusion of that long affair, the PdL left the government and suffered a split within the party. On the one side, Berlusconi’s former
party, Forza Italia, was revived, receiving support from the majority of the parliamentary groups that were loyal to their leader and rejected the idea of supporting a government with those who had voted for his removal. On the other side, a new parliamentary group, the New Center-Right (NCD, Nuovo Centrodestra), was founded with Angelino Alfano as its leader. Since April, Alfano, who was Berlusconi’s own choice as the next leader of the PdL, had been serving as the minister of the interior, and he remained in the government, thereby providing it with necessary parliamentary support and, indeed, ensuring its very survival.

So this was the political turmoil that ruined the prospects of forming a fourth bicameral committee on constitutional reforms (after the ones in 1983–1985, 1992–1994, and 1997–1998). Twenty senators and 20 deputies would have been tasked with drawing up proposed revision laws for Part II of the Constitution (excluding Article IV, which refers to the magistracy, and Article VI, which relates to safeguarding the Constitution) and a draft electoral law linked to the proposed amendment to the Constitution. It had been envisioned that all of this would take place within the context of a fast-track process, albeit with the same regard to maintaining the proper degree of rigor as laid out in Article 138 of the Constitution (as with the committees in 1992–1994 and 1997–1998).

What remains, however, is the work carried out by a committee set up by the government on 11 June, following the motions passed by the chambers on 29 May. The committee was made up of 35 experts, along with seven others who were to act as “editors.” Titled the Commission for Constitutional Reforms, its task was to carry out an in-depth analysis of the various suggestions for amendments to the Constitution and how these would affect the electoral system. This Commission worked harmoniously and in a transparent manner, with its meetings being made available on video or by audio, notwithstanding the heated public debate around it and in spite of the fact that two of its members found fault with it and decided to resign. The Commission completed its work one month ahead of schedule, delivering its report to the government on 17 September.26

Napolitano’s Presidency: His Role in the Italian System and His Legacy

The events outlined above lead us to consider once again how Giorgio Napolitano, the president of the Republic, interpreted his role—both as the president who completed his first mandate and as the president
moving into his second one. In this regard, a number of scholars have pointed out a significant difference in Napolitano’s first period as president compared with previous presidencies, although it came during what might be defined as the breakdown of the political-party system, which was made worse by the context of the economic crisis. In fact, the disruption within the party system had the inevitable effect of forcing the president, whether he wished to or not, to make full use of the powers that the Constitution bestows on him. Even in his first seven-year term, Napolitano had increasingly acted as a political protagonist (albeit by means of acts countersigned by the government) to the point where Italy seemed to be coming close to what some have described as a “president’s republic.”

There are two reasons why it has been possible to make such a claim. First, the interpretation of the figure and role of the president of the Republic is flexible and elusive, governed more by practice than by rules. The boundaries of the presidency are determined not only by what is clearly laid down in the Constitution (e.g., see Article 90), but also by the strength of the party system. Over time, various presidents have exercised their powers with a degree of influence inversely proportional to the weakness or strength of the party system and of the relations between the government and Parliament (i.e., government-parliamentary or party groups). Second, when faced with a deep crisis in the party system, the president’s actions, making direct use of the intrinsic flexibility provided by the constitutional model, may be seen as the only remedy to overcome the increasingly intolerable political instability. Napolitano witnessed this crisis in terms of both the efficiency of the political system itself and, after the 2013 elections, the relations between voters and their representatives.

In a word, the need to deal with a critical situation led President Napolitano—in what seems to be the most fitting interpretation—to carry out the role of a “spare engine,” as already envisaged by constitutional doctrine. Without hesitating to use all the power of his moral suasion, he spread the mantle of the presidential institution (strength, consensus, and power), like a modern-day Saint Martin, to provide the most suitable and constitutionally legitimate solutions for the various crises. Thus, from the turmoil affecting Berlusconi’s fourth government leading to the creation of the Monti government, to the defense of a constant application of rigor in public accounts, to the decision, finally, to agree to being re-elected so that the 17th Legislature could get underway and a government could be formed—in all this, Napolitano utilized the full spectrum of powers at his disposal. As a result, the need for immediate and very uncertain elections was avoided, and this perhaps allowed the other political actors to produce
the necessary reforms so that the institutions could once again begin to function properly.

However, it is obvious that if the “bellows of the accordion of his powers” remain open (to use a well-known metaphor conceived by Amato, now a constitutional judge), as opposed to what the founding fathers expected—that is, only occasional extensions of a president’s powers—it becomes difficult to legitimize such powers. Their permanent use, in fact, is likely to change definitively the figure of the president within the political order.

Until now, this problem does not seem to have arisen because the exercise of presidential powers has been perfectly compatible with the Italian form of government, and it has been geared mainly toward putting the spotlight on political and constitutional reforms. These themes have been the hallmark of Napolitano’s presidency, at the core both of his first term and, even more so, of his second, which appears ever more clearly to be the natural continuation of the first.

It was clear that this was how things stood at the end of Napolitano’s first seven-year mandate. With the election of the new president of the Republic about to take place, he chose to put together a program for his successor and to sustain the possibility of a broad coalition government, appointing a committee of “wisemen” in March. This was followed in June by the Commission for Constitutional Reforms, intended as an instrument to enable both the new government and the new Parliament to function.

In this respect, the two groups of experts, some of whom were members of both bodies, and the content of their findings represent the link between the two presidencies. The presidency that Napolitano was completing and the one that he was embarking on both aimed, with a degree of continuity, to strengthen the content and direction of a government in a structurally unstable political situation with a weak policy agenda that it is continually forced to renegotiate.

In the end, the reforms became not only an important matter per se, but also the way to give the legislature the prospect of a functioning government, beginning with the formation of the Letta government in April. This can be seen in the speed with which action was taken on parliamentary motions: the setting up of the committee of experts, the law on the amendments procedure, and the time frames set for them. In fact, when the report from the second group of experts was received in October, it appeared possible that government action could be resumed, with the approval of the law that established the parliamentary committee and then with the “bridging” electoral law to resolve the feared issues of unconstitutionality concerning the Calderoli law. That was to take place in December, at the same time as the expected sentence of
the Constitutional Court on the electoral law (which would be Sentence No. 1/2014). The reforms were designed, therefore, as an instrument to give stability and longer-term prospects to the government.

In reality, things turned out differently. Berlusconi’s dismissal from the Senate altered the make-up of the majority and brought an end to the process for an ad hoc review of the Constitution. The interim electoral law was not approved in time to avoid the sentence of the Constitutional Court, and in December the election of Renzi as the PD’s new secretary set in motion other processes that were to affect the majority and the stability of the government.

Does nothing remain of the presidential strategy? Far from it. Everything that has happened seems to strengthen the need for substantial reforms of the political and institutional systems. Events have confirmed that the prospects for the 17th Legislature are linked to its ability to introduce these reforms (the electoral law, the bicameral system, and, in particular, Article V of the Constitution, on local autonomy), at least within the strictly necessary limits to enable the system to function. However, one thing has become clear: looking on the reforms as “fuel” to keep the government going forward in the long term will not be enough if the executive and its majority do not succeed in getting the reforms passed by Parliament, regardless of the repeated warnings from the president.

When the crisis within and between the parties becomes acute again, the consequence is inevitable. Unless there is an overall acceptance of the extremely difficult situation of the political system, and unless all the political parties are committed to working together to resolve a few key matters concerning reforms (above all, those mentioned above), any attempt to create a stable governability is doomed to fail.

The alternative would be to accept that what is today Italy’s spare engine—that is, the president of the Republic, as the principal governmental actor with no connection to the parties—functions more effectively than any government that relies on the backing of Parliament. This would be a choice, though, that would open the way to a new, semi-presidential approach, for which the degree of political consensus and agreement within public opinion are still to be assessed.

Even if this alternative were adopted, it would still be necessary to pursue the route of constitutional reform. That makes it even more important to recognize the strategic value of President Napolitano’s decision to do everything possible to push political forces, parties, and Parliament toward reforms. Whether it was through personal choice or the effect of the historical/political situation, his whole experience as head of state has been characterized by the central importance given to the theme of political and institutional reforms. The Constitutional
Court itself has summarized the role of the president of the Republic as “providing services for unity.” In the view of the Court, these services consist in guaranteeing “the cohesion and harmonious functioning of the political and safeguarding powers that make up the constitutional system of the Republic … by adopting measures geared toward reactivating the normal cycle of constitutional functions.”

This is no small feat, but it is one that Napolitano, perhaps more than any other president, has been repeatedly called on to perform during his first mandate, and even more so during his second one.

— Translated by David Bull

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Notes


3. In November, most of the PdL was to go back to being Forza Italia after the split in the party following the removal of Silvio Berlusconi from the Senate and the creation of a new political-parliamentary group, the New Center-Right.

4. The coalition known as Italy—Common Good (IBC, Italia—Bene Comune), with the PD as the main party, obtained 29.54 percent with 10,047,603 votes, while the center-right coalition, led by the PdL, received 29.3 percent with 9,923,109 votes.

5. Both the PD and the PdL announced after the vote that they could no longer support such a government, in part because of the poor results achieved by the SC.

6. Two newly appointed parliamentarians were elected presidents of the two branches of Parliament. In the Senate, the PD’s ex-national anti-Mafia public prosecutor, Pietro Grasso, won the ballot against the PdL’s outgoing president, Renato Schifani (137 votes against 117, 52 blanks, 7 void). The ex-spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the SEL’s Laura Boldrini, became the new president of the Chamber on the
fourth ballot against Roberto Fico of the M5S (327 votes against 108, 18 votes lost, 155 blanks, 10 void).

7. The two closest collaborators of Bersani, Stefano Di Traglia and Chiara Geloni, went on to write that Bersani never asked President Napolitano to present himself before the chambers to challenge directly the hostility of the M5S. See S. Di Traglia and C. Geloni, Giorni bugiardi (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 2013).


9. See the chapter by Luca Lanzalaco in this volume.

10. The list of eligible candidates selected in the first stage included Emma Bonino, Dario Fo, Milena Gabanelli, Gustavo Zagrebelsky, Gino Strada, Ferdinando Imposimato, Gian Carlo Caselli, Prodi, Grillo, and Rodotà. All of the data (number of voters, turnout, etc.) were not published until 23 April (by which time the president was already elected), and they showed a response of fewer than 30,000 voters.


13. Nevertheless, this number of votes exceeded the absolute majority required to be elected from the fourth round of voting onward (equivalent to 504 votes). It was the first time that a candidate who had been able to achieve a sufficient number of votes to be elected from the fourth round onward (in one of the first three rounds) was then left to the side.

14. Citing different reasons, both Bersani and the PD’s president, Rosy Bindi, announced their resignations from their posts.

15. On 22 April 2013, one such crowd of protestors jeered and ridiculed Stefano Fassina, the leader of the left within the PD, in the square outside the Chamber.

16. In a statement released by the Quirinal dated 21 February 2013, just three days before the elections, it was emphasized that “President Napolitano has for a long time publicly indicated the institutional and personal reasons why he considers it impossible to stand again for the presidency of the Republic.” See http://www.quirinale.it.


18. “The President of the Republic, Giorgio Napolitano, received this morning, at their request, the representatives of the Partito Democratico, of Popolo della Libertà, and of the Lega Nord. He also received the Prime Minister, Mario Monti, on behalf of the parliamentary groups of Scelta Civica. Finally, the Head of State met a large delegation of the presidents of the regions. All of these expressed a strong belief that, in the grave situation, which had been brought about by the voting rounds for the election of the new Head of State, it was absolutely necessary and urgent that Parliament should hold an ordinary sitting and use this to show unity and national cohesion with the re-election of President Napolitano … President
Napolitano stated that he would give notice of … his decision.” Statement released by the Quirinal, 20 April 2013, http://www.quirinale.it.

19. “In light of the reasons that have been outlined to me, and out of respect for the individuals who have until now stood for the election of the new Head of State, I believe I should make myself available in response to the requests I have received. Of course, during this morning’s talk, no discussion took place on topics other than the election of the President of the Republic. I am moved in this moment by the feeling that I cannot shun assuming responsibility toward the nation, but I trust that there will be a similar collective assumption of responsibility.” Statement released by the Quirinal, 20 April 2013, http://www.quirinale.it.

20. The fact that Napolitano had agreed to be re-elected only under certain conditions became clear in a statement made after the outcome of the vote was known. In it, the president said: “On Monday, in front of the chambers, thereby agreeing to the call for an ordinary sitting, I will have the opportunity to outline the terms under which I have decided to accept in absolute transparency the appeal made to me to take on the role of president. And I will clarify how I intend to adhere strictly to the exercising of my institutional functions.” Statement released by President Napolitano after the outcome of the vote was announced, 20 April 2013, http://www.quirinale.it. Also see “Messaggio del Presidente della Repubblica Giorgio Napolitano al Parlamento nel giorno del giuramento.” Statement released by the Quirinal, 22 April 2013, http://www.quirinale.it.

21. See “Messaggio del Presidente della Repubblica.”

22. “On the subject of reforms, the part that is most congenial to me in the execution of my duties is constitutional reforms. I have insisted on this since the beginning of my first mandate and following the rejection, in the referendum, of the wide-ranging law amending the Constitution that was passed by Parliament in 2005 with a majority that did not reach two-thirds. I argued then that it was still possible to consider that some possibly more limited and ‘targeted’ reforms of the second part of the Constitution were compatible with the verdict from the referendum. In addition, there have been attempts to achieve this, on the basis of a possible broad parliamentary consensus toward the end of the 16th Legislature, but in the end these came to nothing due to foolhardy moves to push them through … To miss the opportunity once again to achieve the objective of reviewing the second part of the Constitution would have fatal consequences for the relaunching of the potential and the progress of the nation … For us, the formation of the Letta government at the end of April did not signify a rejection of bipolar competition; rather, it was the only way to come to terms with the reality of Parliament as it emerged from the vote in February.” Statement released by the Quirinal, 16 December 2013, http://www.quirinale.it.

23. “This time, the only possible way forward for this matter is the successful approval of the reforms that the country has been awaiting for too long. In 18 months I will check to see whether the project is moving toward a safe haven. If I am reasonably certain that the process to review the Constitution will be successful, then we shall be able to continue with our
work. If, on the other hand, any vetoes or uncertainties were to threaten yet again to cause things to become bogged down, I would have absolutely no hesitation in assuming the consequences.” Letta government statement on its program, 29 April 2013, http://www.governo.it.


25. To be precise, at its first reading the draft law was approved by the Senate on 11 July, with amendments. It was approved by the Chamber on 10 September and then went on to be approved by the Senate at the second reading on 23 October.

