Politics, Public Policy and Intergovernmental Arrangements: 
the Case of Health Care in Italy and Spain

* Federico Razetti

Università degli Studi di Milano – Centro di Ricerca e Documentazione Luigi Einaudi, Torino
federico.razetti@secondowelfare.it

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Abstract

Intergovernmental relations (IGR) have become increasingly salient in many Western States, adding (or redefining) a new dimension of politics within multi-tiered domestic arenas. Different institutional tools for managing transformed intergovernmental relations (Intergovernmental Arrangements) are both theoretically possible and empirically observable. In this paper, the consequences of varieties in Intergovernmental Arrangements are investigated in two neo-regional countries – Italy and Spain – in one of the public policy sectors most affected by the processes of territorial re-scaling: health care. Grounded on a new-institutional perspective and based on the adoption of a Most Similar System research Design (MSSD), the comparative analysis explores whether observable differences in IGAs can account for variations in intergovernmental policy-making processes channelled through them, particularly in terms of the kind of conflict lines and actors’ coalitions emerging in IGR processes. Overall, collected evidence shows that, once set in place, differently organized Intergovernmental Arrangements are able to play a part in shaping the politics of intergovernmental relations.

Key-words: IGR, Intergovernmental Arrangements, Health Policy, Politics, Italy, Spain
1. Introduction

For a long time, large part of the literature on Intergovernmental Relations (IGR) has preferred stressing similarities among systems, rather than investigating reasons and consequences of observable institutional differences. Because of the prevalence of a functionalist bias, the so called ‘policy imperatives’ – portrayed, at once, as causes and effects of devolutionary processes – have been among the factors most commonly evoked to account, in a quite general way, for the increasing complexity of multi-level policy-making in compound politics, as well as for the pervasiveness of IGR.

Putting the analytical focus on the explanation of differences more than on description of similarities – as made by a more recent wave of contributions in the growing literature on these issues – allows addressing two major, otherwise neglected, research questions: 1. Why do different systems opt for different institutional structures for managing intergovernmental relations (that is, different Intergovernmental Arrangements)? 2. Which is the impact (if any) of different Arrangements on intergovernmental policy-making? While not forgetting the strict interrelation between these two questions, this contribution specifically addresses the second one, looking at whether and how intergovernmental arrangements are able to play a ‘formative’ or ‘transformative impact’ (Heinmiller 2002; Bolleyer 2009) on the kind of conflict lines and actors’ coalitions emerging in the intergovernmental policy-making arena.

To this end, the remainder of this paper is organized as follows. After having clarified the new-institutional theoretical perspective adopted in the analysis (Section 2), the third part clarifies some basic conceptual issues and provides a set of theoretically-derived hypotheses to be next empirically tested. In Section 4 the logic followed for country and policy case selection is explained. A preliminary, empirical overview of divide lines and actors’ coalitions prevailing in the two cases under analysis is given in Section 5. Two case studies, explored in depth in Section 6, will then allow tracing in a more robust way observed variations in IGR divide lines and coalitions back to intergovernmental arrangements’ features. The last Section concludes.

2. A New-Institutional Perspective

New-institutionalism addresses a common set of questions, all basically linked to the exploration of the ways in which preferences expressed in politics (and their aggregation) are affected by the institutional context in which policy-makers operate (Immergut 1998). When applied to the study of intergovernmental relations, the new-institutional approach may mean investigating both the origins of Intergovernmental Arrangements (I borrow this term from Bolleyer 2009) and the way in which formal institutions build up for managing intergovernmental relations are able to exert a ‘formative impact’ (Heinmiller 2002) on the policies carried on by their means.

Answering these two general research questions entails the adoption of two different approaches to explanation, or rather, a shift of the analytical focus when moving from the first to second one. In a nutshell, while in the first question Intergovernmental Arrangements are treated as the main dependent variable to account for, in the second question they become instead the main independent variable, possibly accounting for variations in multilevel decision-making (see the Figure below).

In both cases new-institutionalism reminds the importance of analysing institutions not in isolation, but always taking into consideration their mutual relationships and their joint effects (the so called ‘institutional constellation’). In the realm of IGR, this entails the relevance of looking at both its vertical and horizontal articulations, as well as at their linkages among them and with the broader political-institutional context they are embedded in.

While some studies have already applied new institutional insights to the analysis of IGR, until recently just few have explicitly considered the role played by Intergovernmental Arrangements in shaping multi-level public policies. In recent times, most contributions have explored the first research question evoked above, that is they have tried to identify different political-institutional factors able to account for variations in intergovernmental relations and arrangements (e.g. Bolleyer et al. 2014; Bolleyer 2009, Mc Ewen et al. 2012, León and Ferrin Pereira 2011, Colino and Parrado 2008, Swenden and Jans 2006, 2007; Börzel 2000, 2002).

Turning now to the second question – which treats Intergovernmental Arrangements as an independent variable – literature appears less rich. Some contributions have aimed at assessing the impact of
IGAs’ features in terms of IGR *outputs*. Following this path, Simmons (2004), Ferrin Pereira (2009) and Bolleyer (2009) have tried to connect the level of intergovernmental arrangements’ institutionalization with the level of cooperation reached in these arenas, measured either in terms of quantity or in terms of precision and binding capacity of subscribed agreements. Looking at the impact exerted by IGAs on intergovernmental relations may also mean to examine whether the institutional structures channelling such relations are able to account for the features of the *processes* through which intergovernmental policy decisions are taken. Füglister (2012), for instance, assesses the impact of institutionalized horizontal intergovernmental cooperation on policy diffusion: the ability of explaining it as a consequence of learning rather than alternative diffusion mechanisms (such as competition or imitation) crucially depends on the analysis of the IGR processes conducted within intergovernmental arrangements.

A less explored way of assessing the possible shaping effect of IGAs on IGR policy *processes* consists in looking for the existence of a causal relationship between IGAs’ features and the kind of ‘conflict lines’ and ‘intergovernmental coalitions’ (e.g. Grau i Creus, 2000; Colino and Parrado, 2008) emerging in IGR policy-making process carried out through them. This is an approach more directly consistent with the specific research question empirically addressed in the reminder of this paper: *do different IGAs have an impact on structuring the kind of IGR conflict lines and actors’ coalitions emerging during intergovernmental decision-making processes?*

**3. Defining Key-Concepts and Building-up Hypotheses**

Before moving on, it is necessary to clarify some basic concepts.

In this contribution, the term ‘intergovernmental arrangement’ is used to refer to all *those permanent institutional boards, composed of representatives of executives placed either at the same or at different territorial levels, dealing with the management of intergovernmental relations, (mostly) within the domestic arena*. While by IGR I will mean what McEwen et al. (2012) call the ‘intergovernmental dynamics’, by IGA I will refer to what these authors call the ‘intergovernmental machinery’2. A clear and convincing definition of Intergovernmental Relations is, for instance, the short one proposed by Swenden and Jans (2007), who, offering a sort of minimal formulation of the concept, characterize IGR as ‘patterns of central-regional (vertical) or inter-regional (horizontal) interaction between different (levels of) government(s) within a state with a view of co-ordinating issues of mutual concern’ (1).

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1 The focus here will be on those institutional arrangements in which the most relevant political (and administrative) actors are the governments, meaning by ‘governments’ not the ‘jurisdictions’, but the ‘executives’ representing each jurisdiction. The reason of this choice simply derives from the empirical observation – condensed in the expression ‘executive federalism’ coined by Watts at the end of the Eighties (1989) – that the management of intergovernmental issues in institutionalized arenas has increasingly become a matter of executives intervention, at least in parliamentary systems: ‘[I]n all the parliamentary federations [reviewed], the major instrument for the resolution of intergovernmental relations has been consultation and negotiation between the executives (and their representatives) of the different governments within these federations’ (Watts 1989, p. 8, emphasis original).

2 I employ the term ‘Intergovernmental Arrangement’ (IGA), already introduced in the literature by Bolleyer (2006; 2009) in order to focus less ambiguously on intergovernmental structures or ‘machinery’. In this way, I aim avoiding both the confusion (often present in the literature) deriving from the use of a single term (Intergovernmental Relations – IGR) with many different meanings (homonymy), as well as from the introduction of an unnecessary new synonym, likely to increase, rather than reduce, existing conceptual confusion (Sartori 1970).
To make sense of IGAs’ variety\(^3\) three dimensions – the territorial scale, the policy competences and the degree of institutionalization – may be singled out, based on both empirical and theoretical literature. A first, basic distinction to be considered pertains to the territorial scale at which intergovernmental arrangements operate: IGAs can in fact be organized vertically or horizontally, depending on their membership and their goal (the coordination of vertical or horizontal relations). Secondly, both vertical and horizontal IGAs may be designed to cope with issues related to specific policy-fields or to deal with every kind of matter of mutual concern in IGR: in the first case, it is to speak of generalist bodies, while in the second case of sectoral or policy-specific arrangements.

While these two dimensions – the vertical or horizontal design, and the generalist or policy-specific focus – may help making sense, in a preliminary way, of the complexity and variety of existing intergovernmental arrangements, at a deeper level an additional dimension is to be added. In fact, insofar IGAs are intended as the institutional arenas in which matters pertaining to IGR are determined, a crucial point is related to the rules, the organizational norms and resources structuring these arenas. From this point of view, the basic questions to be answered are thus the following: ‘To what extent are the institutions of intergovernmental relations built into formal governing structures? […] Or are the institutions fluid and ad hoc, developing and changing according to the political needs of the participating governments?’ (Simeon 2002, 92). Shortly, the point, strictly consistent with the theoretical perspective adopted here, is about the degree of institutionalization of IGAs. Based on the existing research, it is possible to systematize the indicators most commonly evoked in the literature as pertaining to the level of IGAs’ institutionalization into four different dimensions. No one of these dimensions is to be interpreted neither as logically preceding another one, nor as a necessary condition for the concept of institutionalization itself. Rather, an additive logic may be seen at the basis of their combination.

1. **Formal Basis**: this dimension refers to the existence or not of any kind of formalized document, specifying the establishment, the members, the functions, and the decision rules of a given IGA. Such a document may take the form of a constitutional provision (extremely rare), of a founding Law or of an internal regulation voted by the partners.

2. **Density of Contacts**: besides the existence of a formal basis, many scholars agree on the importance of what may be referred to as the ‘density of contacts’ occurring in practice between the members of an IGA. Many scholars have pointed out the so-called ‘interpersonal dimension’ as a major feature of IGR (Wright 1974, McEwen et al. 2012, León and Ferrín Perreira 2011). In turn, such density of interactions may refer to different indicators: the frequency of the meetings (how often are IGAs meetings effectively called?) as well as to the regularity of such contacts (are meetings called irregularly, according to an ad hoc logic, or are they scheduled consistently with established temporal patterns?). The higher the density of contacts, the higher the level of institutionalization. As summarized by Simmons (2004), ‘an institutionalized forum would have an established history of consistent interaction among its ministers’ (291, emphasis added).

3. **Network of Bureaucratic and Technical Support**: an important dimension pertains undoubtedly to the availability, for the governments belonging to an IGA, of a structured network of bureaucratic and technical support, dedicated to the management of intergovernmental relations. As already put in evidence by Wright (1974), the role of bureaucrats is to be considered as central when examining IGR. The existence of an autonomous Secretariat Office, dealing with preliminary issues and practically organizing intergovernmental meetings following established procedures, as well as the differentiation of an IGA into technical specialized units (or secondary level units, composed by officials with a specific expertise in a given domain), may be interpreted as empirical manifestations of relatively high degrees of institutionalization.

4. **Powers**: even if all IGAs deal with the management of IGR issues, not all enjoy the same set of powers. Some IGAs are indeed endowed with true decision-taking powers (able, by consequence, to legally bind the parties), while others (the large majority, in practice) can exert a consultative power, or be even more simply devoted to activities of information exchange.

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\(^3\) In the Appendix is provided a schematic overview of IGAs in main Western federal and highly decentralised countries.
Turning our attention now to the dependent variable, a possible way of distinguishing intergovernmental coalitions and conflict lines consists in assessing to which measure ‘the nature of the intergovernmental game [...] depend[s] upon the political party in charge of the different governments’, or, by contrast, to which measure a territorial perspective is prevalent, meaning that subnational units ‘take institutional positions towards the central government policies; that is, notwithstanding the party in control in central government, the governments of the [regions] constitute the “subnational level opposition”’ (Grau i Creus 2000, 69-70, emphasis added). While this latter perspective would make intergovernmental conflict lines and coalitions independent of the degree of intergovernmental political congruence among actors, the organization of the arena according to party-partisan conflict lines would make IGR actors’ coalitions dependent on the parties in office across governments. The central question is then: are divide lines and actors’ coalitions emerging during IGR processes mainly organized around governments’ party or territorial affiliation? If so, can be IGAs considered as an institutional condition playing a role in exerting a ‘formative impact’ on these coalitions?

Empirically, coalitions and divide lines at work in the intergovernmental game carried out through IGAs can be detected by looking at the kind of coordinated, collective actions developed by IGR actors (the central and the regional executives) when they have to jointly address intergovernmental issues. Intergovernmental relations have often been criticized because of the secrecy and lack of transparency surrounding them (e.g. Breton 1996). Putting aside normative considerations, such feature of intergovernmental relations clearly makes an analysis of their unfolding a complicated research goal. As long as Intergovernmental Arrangements tend to convene behind closed doors, an assessment of the kind of divide lines and coalitions of actors prevailing within these arenas must thus rely on qualitative evidence coming from documentary analysis (of IGAs’ activity reports, minutes of the meetings whenever available), interviews with key-IGR actors, as well as from a reconstruction – through an extensive review of major newspapers articles – of IGR actors’ public statements and press releases. Major collective actions to be considered refer to all those initiatives which actors can put in place – by groups or unanimously – in order to jointly advance a claim or manifest their position towards the central government about specific IGR issues or, more generally, the way in which IGR are managed through multilateral IGAs. Looking particularly at vertical IGR, these strategies, which generally entail the decision to carry out highly visible, public remonstrations, can take, in turn, several forms. The most typical are the following:

1. The request to convene a meeting: regional actors may ask an Intergovernmental Arrangement to be convened, so to force the central government to address IGR issues.
2. The demand to include particular items on the agenda: similarly, regional actors may ask for the inclusion of specific matters in the order of business of an IGA’s meeting.
3. The early abandonment of an IGA’s meeting underway: in this case, regional actors make manifest their dissenting stance on IGR issues by leaving an IGA’s meeting early.
4. The boycott of an IGA’s meetings: regional actors may decide not to attend at all a scheduled meeting with the central government in sign of protest.
5. The definition of distinct voting choices: whenever voting procedures do exist, regional actors may eventually decide to signal their position by means of a vote.

Simplifying, I assume that all these collective actions can be organized following either a territorial or a partisan perspective. If a partisan perspective is prevalent, one should expect State-Regions conflicts to be dependent on the political composition of the different interacting governments (their partisan congruence or incongruence). By contrast, if a ‘subnational-level perspective’ is prevalent, conflicts should be

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4 The empirical comparative analysis offered in Sections nos. 4 to 6 draws upon data collected from – and cross-checked through – multiple sources, so as to increase, whenever possible, the general robustness of the findings (George and Bennett 2005). Data provided by secondary sources on IGR and IGAs (existing academic and grey country-specific literature) is thus complemented with information provided by documentary analysis (minutes and reports of IGAs’ meetings, texts of laws, IGAs’ founding agreements and regulations, parliamentary speeches), interviews with IGR actors and country-experts (Richards 1996; Tansey 2007; Harvey 2011), as well as from an extensive review of newspapers’ articles in both countries. The lists of interviews and of newspapers reviewed are available in the Appendix.
independent on the political composition of these governments. In the former case, coalitions will be composed of actors belonging to the same political side; in the latter case, coalitions will be instead made of actors belonging to the same territorial level. The choice of one of these two strategies may become even more apparent in the convening of prior meetings by different groups of IGR actors, by which the position to be collectively taken in the IGAs is previously agreed on\(^5\).

**Hypotheses**

Few ‘off the shelf’ hypotheses are available as to the supposed impact specifically exerted by IGAs on the nature of policy-making, and on its outputs. Integrating insights suggested by different strands of existing literature on these issues (e.g. Füglister 2012, León and Ferrín Pereira 2009, 2011, Benz 2009, Scharpf 1988), a set of theoretically-derived hypotheses is now laid out, linking the types of IGAs (their features, their characteristics) to the kind of politics and degree of politicization characterizing the policy-making processes channelled through them.

First, it seems reasonable to hypothesize a comparatively high level of institutionalization of IGAs to reduce the degree of party-partisanship of the intergovernmental decision-making processes. The supposed underlying causal mechanisms refer specifically to three of the four dimensions of institutionalization considered above: the existence of a formal basis; the role played within IGAs by bureaucratic and technical bodies, and the frequency and regularity of the meetings. The existence of a formal basis, making actors’ behaviour more predictable, should contribute to increase their mutual trust, independently from their respective partisan affiliation. In turn, the actual operation of bureaucratic and technical bodies (such a Secretariat and policy-specialized units) should be likely to favour the emergence of a ‘community of experts’, formed around common and shared orientations, making intergovernmental cooperation less ‘permeable’ to high politics. Technical and bureaucratic bodies should be expected to exert a sort of ‘shielding effect on IGR (Benz 2009): the higher the role of technical bodies, the lower the politicization of IGR (and vice versa). As to the contacts between IGR actors, it should be expected that the higher their density, the stronger the links of trust among participants and their problem-solving (rather than bargaining) orientation (Scharpf 1988), irrespective of their partisan affiliation\(^6\).

\[ H_1: \text{The higher (lower) the degree of an IGA's institutionalization, the lower (higher) the relevance of IGR actors' party affiliation in intergovernmental policy-making processes carried out by means of this IGA.} \]

Second, the distinction between a generalist and a policy-specific design of IGAs appears as worthy to be explored as well. Although rarely considered from this perspective (e.g. Ruggiu 2006), such a distinction may be expected to exert an influence on the process of IGR actors’ preferences’ aggregation in the following way. While a generalist organization, by making possible cross-sectoral exchanges and compensations, could widen the mediation spectrum between opposite stances, and make cross-parti-

\(^5\) Note also that, due to the distinct features of the IGAs under analysis, one could expect the specific strategies followed by IGR actors to vary depending on the institutional setting (IGAs’ organizational rules, powers…) in which they act. This is why, as it will be shown, partly different indicators will be looked at in the different arrangements taken into consideration in this analysis. For instance, boycotts or abandonments of IGAs by groups of actors may be the best strategy to be followed (in order to make IGR conflicts evident) when decisions have to be taken by consensus; by contrast, when voting procedures do exist, disagreements may become explicit by means of distinct voting choices.

\(^6\) As explained by Scharpf (1988), ‘problem solving’ is characterized by the appeal to common values, interests or norms, as opposed to ‘distributive bargaining’, which is instead dominated by the appeal to the individual self-interests of all participants. In problem solving, the emergence of an orientation towards common interests and values ‘may facilitate voluntary agreement even when sacrifices in terms of individual self-interest are necessary and cannot be immediately compensated through “side payments” or “package deals”’ (261). The emergence of such an orientation may be rooted in the perception of a common identity and/or of a common vulnerability, and while the preconditions of problem-solving are difficult to be created, they may be easily eroded (265).
sian alignments more likely, a policy-specific arrangement, which does not allow for cross-sectoral exchanges and compensations, could by contrast exacerbate existing tensions deriving from intergovernmental political incongruence.

\[ H_2: \text{While a generalist design of an IGA may favor the emergence of cross-partisan alignments, a policy-specific organization of an IGA may exacerbate existing party-partisan tensions.} \]

Third and finally, looking at a given country’s IGAs’ system as a whole (that is, at arrangements’ combination), rather than at intergovernmental arrangements taken in isolation, one could expect the kind of prevailing IGR actors’ coalitions to be dependent also on the kind of territorial level at which existing IGAs do operate. From this perspective, an exclusively vertical IGAs system could be seen as more likely to favour the emergence of party-partisan coalitions, compared with a system characterized by the co-presence of both vertical and horizontal IGAs. The existence of these latter could be interpreted as a condition contributing to hamper the formation of partisan vertical coalitions, by favouring the emergence of territorial, and thus cross-partisan, alignments among IGR actors.

\[ H_3: \text{Vertical intergovernmental partisan coalitions should be more likely (unlikely) when a horizontal intergovernmental arrangement is lacking (present)} \]

Some caveats are necessary. The first to be kept in mind is that the hypotheses linking the features of IGAs and the level of politicization of IGR carried out within them presuppose a more general *eateris paribus clause*. It must indeed be reminded that many other ‘background’ or intervening conditions singled out by the literature, different from IGAs’ features – ranging from the form of State to the kind of policy at stake to the degree of partisan (in)congruence among IGR actors – may be assumed as potentially equally relevant. The hypotheses just laid out try to ‘isolate’ the impact of IGAs. From a methodological point of view, this entails that the potential ‘shaping effect’ of an IGA on the IGR process can only be assessed comparing cases as most similar as possible in what concern all these alternative explanations. I will come back on this issue in the next Section and, more extensively, in Section no. 6.

The second caveat, strictly linked to the previous one, refers to the scope conditions limiting the applicability of the hypotheses under consideration: obviously, only IGR processed through IGAs should be expected to be shaped by these latter.

4. The Logic of Case Selection: Health Policy in Italy and Spain

To empirically test the hypotheses just set out, the adoption of a comparative, qualitative research strategy is implemented. From a general point of view, the research question under analysis may be portrayed as a ‘Does X affect Y?’ question (Anckar 2008), which may be usefully explored by means of a Most Similar System Design (MSSD; Przeworski and Teune 1970, 32-34). Because of the emphasis on the independent variable (IGAs), singled out as potentially relevant by (new-institutional) theoretical reasoning at the beginning of the research process, the adopted research design may be further qualified as a ‘deductive MSSD’ (Anckar 2008). The selection of the healthcare policy sector in Italy and Spain allows meeting most of the requirements imposed by the MSSD logic. The reasons of country and policy case selection will be illustrated in the remainder of this Section.

The policy and institutional scenario

In the general process of State de-structuring and restructuring occurred in several Western European countries over the last decades (Keating 1997, 1998, 2012), the principle of decentralization emerged as a real ‘cornerstone’ of health policy-making (Saltman 2008). While the expansion of the Welfare State had been one of the major drivers of State centralization at least up to the end of the 1960s, since the 1970s the territorial parabola of social protection started to take an opposite path, towards increased decentralization (Ferrera 2005; Loughlin 2009). In the healthcare policy field, the principle of decentralization seemed embodying several advantages, allowing to set positive incentives towards greater
competition in service provision, as well as towards increased fiscal responsibility of sub-national governments (Mosca 2006). Sub-layers of government, and particularly Regions, were thus endowed with greater political, administrative and partially fiscal responsibilities in this field, making healthcare policy one of the sectors in which decentralization has gone farthest.

In the tax-funded health systems of Southern Europe – particularly, in Italy and Spain – ‘administrative and managerial as well as many political (but not key fiscal) responsibilities were devolved from national to regional governments’ (Saltman 2008, 104), in a process begun at the end of the 1970s and culminated at the beginning of 2000s. Today, about two thirds of regional budgets in Italy are devoted to healthcare, making this latter the most relevant policy sector under regional responsibility, in terms of resources absorbed and political visibility (France 2007). In Spain healthcare represents, as well, the first policy sector of regional competence: 90% of public expenditure in health policy is under regional control, the Communities devoting more than one third of their total budgets to this field (Moreno 2005).

For our research purposes, the breadth of devolutionary processes occurred both in Italy and Spain in this policy field makes healthcare policy in these two countries particularly interesting to be explored. The political saliency of Intergovernmental Relations is indeed likely to be relatively high in both national cases. Moreover, from a methodological point of view, Italy and Spain display the advantage of matching many of the requirements imposed by the logic of the MSSD. As observed by Ferrera (2005) and McEwen and Moreno (2005), these two former unitary countries have been moving roughly in the same direction: thoroughgoing decentralization, linked, at the same time, to endogenous politico-institutional dynamics and to the challenges of welfare state reorganization and European integration. As a result of institutional evolutions occurred through time, it can be argued that Italy and Spain – both belonging to the Southern European model of welfare state (Ferrera 1996) and both historically characterized by the transition from a highly centralized, healthcare insurance-based arrangement to a strongly regionalized National Health System – have in common a comparatively high degree of decentralization. This is particularly true in healthcare. In both cases, indeed, fundamental constitutional competences in this policy field are now shared between the national and the regional governments, and the actual management of the health system as well as the delivery of health care services fall (almost entirely) under regional responsibility. Furthermore, neither the Italian health system nor the Spanish one have been the object of re-centralization dynamics (e.g. Maino 2009): on the contrary, both ‘Italy and Spain are pursuing greater decentralization at the same point in time that Northern European countries are shifting away from decentralization in their health systems’ (Saltman 2008, 105-106).

Eventually, today, as a consequence of institutional transformations occurred through time in the two countries, Italian and Spanish intergovernmental arenas are both nested in a broader institutional context characterized by the absence of power-sharing regimes (neither at the regional nor at the national level) and by a comparable degree of symmetry in the distribution of health competences among the subnational units7.

**Variation in the independent variable**

At the same time, these two countries display high variation in what concerns their intergovernmental machinery. Looking at the Intergovernmental Arrangements at work in health care policy in these two highly decentralised countries, it appears evident that Italy is characterized by a stronger development of multilateral IGAs (both on the vertical and on the horizontal dimension) than Spain8.

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7 Both the degree of symmetry in subnational units’ powers and the distinction between ‘power-sharing’ and power-concentrating nature of governments (Bolleyer 2009) are institutional conditions pointed out by the literature as potentially relevant in structuring actors’ incentives towards IGAs’ institutionalization and IGR management.

8 As outlined in the Introduction, the explanation of cross-national or cross-sectoral differences in IGAs may be the object of a complementary research question, treating IGAs as dependent rather than independent variables. Taking this perspective, specific differences in institutional conditions played a major role in shaping the development of multilateral IGAs dealing with healthcare policy issues in the two countries under analysis (Razetti 2014). Current differences in the intergovernmental systems designed in the two countries for dealing with halthcare policy have to be traced back to the respective early stages of decentralization, when unfavorable conditions to the set-up of relatively highly institutionalized intergovernmental arrangements were present in Spain and absent in Italy. In particular, in
Table 1 summarises the main features pertaining to the institutionalization dimensions of each Intergovernmental Arrangement relevant in healthcare multi-level policy making in the two countries under analysis. The most striking differences between the two national cases relate to the horizontal level of organized intergovernmental cooperation. The absence of any regular, clearly institutionalized system of ongoing cooperation among the Spanish Autonomous Communities stands in sharp contrast to the highly structured horizontal intergovernmental arrangement at work in Italy. Here the Regions have been able to self-organize in order to coordinate their action, particularly with the goal of fostering vertical political relationships with the national Government. The recently established Spanish Conference of the Autonomic Governments can hardly be interpreted as an equivalent of the Italian Conference of the Regions. Although provided with a formal basis (setting its rules of working in a very detailed way), the Spanish Conference has met just once since its formal establishment in 2010. This makes even impossible to assess the density of contacts among its members as well as the actual existence and operation of the network of bureaucratic and technical support designed by its Regulations. Consequently, the existence itself of this IGA could be reasonably even called into question. By contrast, the Conference of the Regions, managing the relationships among the Italian Regions since the early 1980s, can be considered as a highly institutionalized arena, also in a broader comparative perspective. Since 2005 this arrangement provided itself with a document laying out in a very specific way its internal rules of working (for the most part, formalizing long-established informal practices). Meetings (both at the political and at the technical level) occur according to a regular and frequent schedule, usually jointly agreed by State and regional representatives: in the period 2003-2012, about 35 plenary meetings have been celebrated each year. The activity of the Conference is furthermore supported by an articulated bureaucratic and technical network, made of political Commissions and Technical Committees (split, in turn, into smaller sub-policy-specific units), and bureaucratic offices (a standing Secretariat and its policy-related branches): they follow highly formalized procedures and ensure the ongoing and ‘regular’ working of this IGA.

Even if less sharp, differences between the two cases do exist also in what concerns vertical arrangements. In Italy the initially policy-specific design of intergovernmental arrangements (developed from the 1960s up to the early 1990s) was gradually substituted by generalist relationships, all managed by means of one arrangement: the State-Regions Conference (Conferenza Stato-Regioni). This multilateral, generalist IGA, established by the central Government in the early 1980s at the request of the Regions themselves, gradually imposed itself as the major tool of regional participation to national policy-making. Strictly advisory activity was more and more paralleled by increasing forms of ‘co-determination’ of State acts by central and regional level representatives. Although generalist, large part of its activity is devoted to health policy management. It meets, on average, more than fifteen times per year, according to a pre-established calendar, usually jointly decided with the Regions; its activity is supported by a standing Secretariat Office, divided, in turn, into policy-related Services: notice that both State

Spain an asymmetrical distribution of competences joined with intra-governmental relations based on ‘power-concentration’ rather than ‘power-sharing’. In spite of a change in the institutional-political conditions potentially affecting actors’ incentives towards IGAs’ institutionalization, Intergovernmental Arrangements, once established, proved highly ‘resilient’ in both contexts. While today, as a consequence of institutional transformations occurred through time in the two countries, Italian and Spanish intergovernmental arenas are both nested in a context characterized by the absence of power-sharing regimes (both at the national and at the regional level) and a comparable degree of symmetry in the distribution of health competences among the subnational units, their IGAs continue to differ on many dimensions. The overcoming of interregional powers’ asymmetry in Spain did not prove to be a sufficient condition for reducing the relative underdevelopment of its multilateral IGAs; likewise, the abandonment of power-sharing dynamics in Italy was not sufficient to reverse the institutional intergovernmental development previously occurred. In general, it seems that the timing (Pierson 2000) by which potentially causal conditions come into play is a relevant question to be carefully considered: asymmetry of powers preceding symmetry in Spain, power-sharing preceding power-concentrating regimes in Italy.

9 For data on and an assessment of the institutionalization level of many horizontal Intergovernmental Arrangements (even if according to slightly different criteria than those used here), see Bolleyer and Bytzek (2009).

10 During the period 2002-2012, more than 93% of its meetings included in the order of business at least one item pertaining to health policy. In the same period, more than one third of the acts passed by the Conference (36%) were related to health policy matters. As a whole, data collected clearly demonstrate that healthcare policy constitutes a constantly present, qualitatively and quantitatively relevant share of the total activity carried out by this generalist IGA.
and regional officials are included in the Secretariat staff. On the whole, these data make clear that this vertical IGA cannot be easily qualified, as made by some scholars, as a ‘purely consultative body […] convoked on request of the central state, which also determines the agenda’ (Palermo and Wilson 2014, 522).

In Spain, by contrast, multilateral vertical cooperation has been managed mainly by means of policy-specific arrangements, called ‘Sectoral Conferences’. Two of them deal – directly or indirectly – with health care policy: the Interterritorial Council of the National Health System (Consejo Interterritorial del Sistema Nacional de Salud: CISNS) and the Fiscal and Financial Policy Council (Consejo de Política Fiscal y Financiera: CPFF). These have never been able to develop a level of activity as intense as in the Italian case. Both the CISNS and the CPFF meet, on average, four times per year, basically when convened by the central executive. They may rely on the support of Working Groups (often, of an ad hoc nature) for the preparation of the issues to be debated in the plenary sessions. Secretariat functions are fulfilled by administrative units reporting to the central Ministry chairing the Conference (which means that these IGAs are not provided with a dedicated Secretariat), and not including regional officials. The establishment of a vertical generalist Conference, set up on the central Government initiative in 2004,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 – Intergovernmental Arrangements in Italy and Spain: institutionalisation dimensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>State-Regions Conference</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ITALY</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>G</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Formal Basis: Law no. 400/1988; Decree no. 281/1997;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Density of Contacts - Frequency: about 17 plenary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meetings per year;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Regularity: high;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bureaucratic and Technical Network: Dedicated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>standing Secretariat; divided into policy-related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Powers: advisory powers on and involvement in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>national law-making impacting on regional compo-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nences; State-Regions agreements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conference of the Presidents</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>G</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Formal Basis: Internal Regulations (Orden TET/3409/2009);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Density of Contacts - Frequency: less than 1 plen-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ary meeting per year;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Regularity: low;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bureaucratic and Technical Network: Secretariat,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparatory Committee; ad hoc Working Groups;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Powers: political agreements and recommenda-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National Health System Interterritorial Council (CISNS)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SPAIN</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ps</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Formal Basis: Laws no. 14/1986 and no. 16/2003;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Density of Contacts - Frequency: about 4 plenary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meetings per year;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Regularity: low;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bureaucratic and Technical Network: Secretariat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>functions provided by the Health Ministry; stand-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ing and ad hoc Working Groups and Commissions;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Powers: information exchange; advisory powers;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State-AACC agreements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fiscal and Financial Policy Council (CPFF)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ps</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Formal Basis: Organic Law no. 8/1980 (LOFCA);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Density of Contacts - Frequency: about 4 plenary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meetings per year;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Regularity: low;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bureaucratic and Technical Network: Secretariat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>functions provided by the Budget Ministry; ad hoc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Groups;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Powers: information exchange; advisory powers;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State-AACC agreements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own elaboration from several country-specific sources. Key: G = Generalist; Ps: Policy-specific.
has represented an interesting attempt to increase the multilateral nature of the Spanish IGR system, by filling one of its historical ‘gaps’. However, the very improvisation of such (unilateral) initiative – reduced, to a certain measure, through the approval of the Conference Regulations in 2009 – casts doubts on its very effectiveness (e.g. Aja 2006; 2008).

5. IGR Politics in Italian and Spanish Health Policy-Making: a Preliminary Overview

Do the different institutional features of Italian and Spanish IGAs, just sketched, actually contribute to determine the kind of IGR divide lines and actors’ coalitions prevailing within the two national intergovernmental health policy-making arenas? In order to address this question, in this Section the existence of a general, correlational matching between the hypotheses laid out in Section 3 and empirical evidence will be preliminary checked for, by ‘mapping’ the prevalent conflict lines and coalitions emerging, in case of disagreement among IGR actors, within multilateral IGAs in the two countries under analysis. Findings of this part will constitute the basis for a more in depth analysis in the next Section. More precisely, what I will try to cast light on in the remainder of this part are the prevailing interaction modalities between the central government and the regional executives (and among these latter) in case of conflict on IGR issues. To this end, I will look at which kind of conflict lines these actors tend to organize along, when they are involved in the management of intergovernmental issues by means of multilateral intergovernmental arrangements. The period of reference is for both countries 2002-201211. As explained before, I assume that all observable collective actions can be organized following either a territorial or a partisan perspective. If a partisan perspective is prevalent, one should expect State-Regions conflicts to be dependent on the political composition of the different interacting governments (their partisan congruence or incongruence). By contrast, if a ‘subnational-level perspective’ is prevalent, conflicts should be independent on the political composition of these governments.

Italy: a ‘subnational level opposition’

As a consequence of the relatively higher degree of institutionalization of its IGAs and the generalist design of its intergovernmental arrangements, the Italian case is expected to be characterized by a comparatively reduced role of partisanship in IGR channelled through IGAs. It must also be added that these latter have developed both at the vertical and at the horizontal scale, and that they form, jointly, an integrated interaction ‘matrix’ for the management of multilateral relations. The existence of a double technical philtrum (horizontally and vertically), a relative high density of meetings, as well as the possibility (in principle, at least) for IGR actors to make cross-sectoral exchanges at both levels (because of the generalist nature of both IGAs), are all institutional conditions expected to favour the emergence of territorial rather than party-partisan coalitions.

Both the existing literature on this point and all actors interviewed agree on the limited role of respective party-affiliations of IGR actors when it comes to address intergovernmental issues by means of intergovernmental arrangements. Looking at Italian multilateral relations it is in fact possible to detect the existence, using Grau i Creu’s words, of a full-blown ‘subnational level opposition’. As efficaciously summarized by an IGR informant interviewed for this research, at the horizontal level relationships among regional Presidents tend to be characterized by a strong ‘esprit de corps’, primarily focused on the defence of territorial interests [IT6]. As to the relationship between the Government and the Regions, it is generally defined as an ‘institutional relation’. In this respect, the role of the ‘President of the Presidents’ (as the head of the horizontal Conference is usually called) tends to be significantly likened by IGR actors to that of a ‘trade unionist’ acting towards the central level on behalf of the so-called ‘regional system’, irrespective of partisan affiliations.

An examination of the collective actions put in place by the regional governments towards the central one during the period 2002-2012 confirms that the coalition congruence or incongruence among the regional governments, and between these latter and the central executive, was not a determining factor in shaping intergovernmental dynamics. As put by an Italian legal scholar, ‘the last ten years are

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11 At the end of 2001, indeed, health policy devolutionary processes were completed both in Italy and in Spain.
filled with numerous episodes of confrontation between the Regions and the Government, which have generally witnessed the Regions to move unanimously, outside the logic of national political alliances, despite the strong rootedness of national parties and the lack of strong regional parties in the Italian party system’ (Ruggiu 2011, 249, translated).

As exposed above, one of the possible collective actions of the regions towards the central government can take the form of a boycot or of an early abandonment of multilateral IGAs’ meetings. In the period of reference, this has occurred several times, always after that this strategy had been decided in a unanimous way by Regional Presidents, by means of the Conference of the Regions. By contrast, no ‘partisan blockages’ – that is, boycotts or abandonments by groups of regions depending on their congruence vis-à-vis the central government – ever took place (for a review see also Ruggiu 2003, 2006, 2011).

Table 2 - State-Regions Conference – Central Government-Regions interaction modalities: major conflicts (2002-2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>CG</th>
<th>RG</th>
<th>Interaction Modalities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>CR</td>
<td>CR (12); CL (6); Aut + CL (2)</td>
<td>Boycott by all the Regions: conflict on the 2003 Budget Law [November] – Address by all the Regions to the President of the Republic: conflict on the 2003 Budget Law [December].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>CR</td>
<td>CR (12); CL (6); Aut + CL (2)</td>
<td>Partial boycott by all the Regions for several months (‘Aventino’): participation to a reduced number of meetings, by means of the only President of the Conference of the Regions; conflict on constitutional draft bill on ‘devolution’ and National Health Fund [February-September] – Address by all the Regions to the President of the Republic: conflict on the 2005 Budget Law [December].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>CR</td>
<td>CR (10); CL (8); Aut + CL (2)</td>
<td>Boycott by all the Regions: conflict on FAS funds allocation [May] – Request by all the Regions of a meeting with the President of the Council [July].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>CR</td>
<td>CL (14); CR (4); Aut. + CL (2)</td>
<td>Abandonment by all the Regions of the Unified Conference and boycott of the State-Regions Conference: conflict on the Social Policy Fund [October].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>CL</td>
<td>CL (14); CR (4); Aut + CL (2)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>CL</td>
<td>CL (14); CR (4); Aut + CL (2)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>CR</td>
<td>CL (13); CR (5); Aut. + CL (2)</td>
<td>Request by all the Regions of a meeting with the President of the Council [July].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>CR</td>
<td>CL (11); CR (7); Aut. + CL (2)</td>
<td>Boycott by all the Regions: conflict on FAS funds allocation [March] – Boycott by all the Regions for several months (‘Aventino’) [April-October, interrupted in July] – Request by all the Regions of an extraordinary meeting with the President of the Council [September].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>CR</td>
<td>CR (11); CL (7); Aut + CL (2)</td>
<td>Boycott by all the Regions [January] – Request, by all the Regions, of an extraordinary meeting of the Conference to return to the State several devolved functions [request then cancelled] [June-July].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>CR</td>
<td>CR (10); CL (7); Aut+CL (2); CR+CL (1)</td>
<td>Boycott by all the Regions: conflict on local public transports and healthcare [June].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>TC</td>
<td>CR (10); CL (7); Aut+CL (2); CR+CL (1)</td>
<td>Abandonment by all the Regions: conflict on the National Health Fund allocation [May] – Abandonment by all the Regions: conflict on Health Fund allocation and “spending review” [June] – Boycott of several, next meetings: conflict on National Health Fund and “spending review”.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own elaboration from several sources. Key: CR = Centre-Right Coalition; CL = Centre-Left Coalition; TC = ‘Technical Cabinet’ (enjoying parliamentary support from both CR and CL); Aut = Autonomist Party or parties. () = No. of Regional Governments controlled.

Table 2 contains a systematic, schematic summary of these episodes along with data on the political affiliation of both regional and central level interacting governments. All major regional initiatives towards the central government were unanimously decided by the Regions. Vertical political congruence between the centre and the majority of the regions does not appear to be a sufficient condition for State-Regions conflicts to be played down. While the absence of strong clashes coincided with the domination of the intergovernmental arena by the centre-left alliance both at the central and at the subnational level (mid 2006-mid 2008), major periods of intense intergovernmental confrontation were in fact characterized by the simultaneous presence of the centre-right coalition both at the centre and in most of the sub-national governments (2002-2004; 2011). Non-participation by all the Regions to the State-Regions Conference – so called Aventinos – occurred for several months in 2004 and 2009.
Spain: government vs. opposition

As seen, if compared with Italy, Spain is characterised by a relatively underdeveloped system of Intergovernmental Arrangements, working (almost) exclusively along the vertical dimension, and addressing IGR issues mainly from a policy-specific perspective. The major generalist vertical IGA – the Conference of the Presidents – was established just few years ago, and has not yet been able to impose itself as a structured arena for IGR management. Moreover, informants have confirmed the strict policy-specific design of the different Sectoral Conferences, no links existing between the CISNS and the CPFF.

Spanish literature tends to agree on a quite high level of politicization of IGR carried out by means of multilateral Intergovernmental Arrangements. In this respect, Grau i Creus (2000) remarks that ‘the intergovernmental game has clearly developed according to a partisan perspective’ (70). More recently, Arbós Marín (2009) argues that, while partisan alignments are not present with the same intensity across all Conferences, and that the degree of technicality of the specific issues under analysis may make a difference, ‘the partisan politicization is a feature of intergovernmental relations in Spain. It is not uncommon that strategies are agreed in the headquarters of the parties, so that in the formal meetings of the Sectoral Conferences Autonomous Communities of the same political colour have coordinated positions. And the general level of confrontation that may arise will depend on whether one or other of the major parties are in government or in opposition. […] Our informants have spoken often about the logic of government or opposition, Spanish scale, which has been considered influential in the development of intergovernmental relations’ (28-29, translated). In their empirical analysis of intergovernmental cooperation in Sectoral Conferences, based on IGR actors’ assessments, León and Ferrín Pereira (2011) remark similarly that ‘[i]ntergovernmental bargaining becomes difficult because the Autonomous Communities governed by the main opposition party systematically oppose any initiative from central government. As a result, [Sectoral Conferences] reproduce the relationship between government and opposition parties in the lower house, and become ineffective as mechanisms of intergovernmental cooperation’ (523, emphasis added).

A review of the intergovernmental decision-making processes developed within Spanish Conferences – summarised in Tables 3 to 5 - confirms the prevalence of these dynamics in cases of disagreement. The achievement of an agreement within intergovernmental arrangements tends indeed to be interpreted by IGR actors according to a ‘partisan perspective’, that is as a success for the central Government and as a consequent failure for the opposition. I will now consider each IGA under analysis, in the period 2002-2012: the CISNS, the CPFF, and the Conference of the Presidents12.

Starting from the Interterritorial Council of the National Health System (CISNS), numerous episodes have been characterized by clashes between the Government and the Communities not ruled by (nor supporting) the party in office at the national level. Such clashes have taken the form, most of the times, of boycotts or early abandonments of the CISNS by the regional governments not congruent with the centre (these protests are commonly named plantes). Actors interviewed for this analysis have confirmed that the so-called politización partidista (party politicization) is a typical feature of the Interterritorial Council working. As put by a former Deputy Director General of the CISNS Secretariat, within this Council, ‘coalitions have always been between parties, and never “territorial” […] decisions of the CISNS are “contaminated” by political parties’ stances’ [SP8]. In this logic, according to a former Director General of the Health Ministry, ‘in fact, the Communities ruled by a party defend the Minister belonging to their own party, and attack the Minister when he belongs to the other party’ [SP7]. Likewise, a former autonomic Director General of Health Economic Resources remarked that ‘the Autonomous Communities ruled by the same party tend to form a “common front” in case of discrepancies among AACC, and between these latter and the central Government’ [SP10].

In the period of reference, it appears evident that the Interterritorial Council, ‘whose working has been defined by the need to achieve consensus in the decision-making process, has suffered from constant blockages arising from its politicization (its use by the opposition party to boycott the policies proposed by the government, through the actions of the health Councillors of the Autonomous Communities under their control), which enabled to use this forum in certain contexts (the most constructive) to reach agreements on specific issues, often of a technical nature, but not to reflect on general

12 The horizontal Conference of the Autonomic Presidents will not be taken into consideration as long as it met just once (2011).
policy issues, the organization and future of the NHS' (Moreno Fuentes 2009, translated). Such initiatives have been given a high level of public visibility by their promoters by means of press conferences and public statements. As shown in Table 3, the most contested issues have been those related to the agenda setting power exerted by the central Government.

Turning now the attention to the other Sectoral Conference under analysis – the Fiscal and Financial Policy Council (CPFF) – when looking at its decisional dynamics it is easy to find out patterns of government-opposition confrontation quite similar to those just observed for the CISNS. Considering again the period 2002-2012, it is evident that Communities’ positions tend to reflect, in several cases, nothing but the alignment of the respective ruling parties towards the national Government: the logic majority/opposition appears to spill over within the Council, without being previously ‘sheltered’ by the intergovernmental arrangement under analysis. Major (but not systematic) exceptions are represented by Communities where the main opposition party at the national level is replaced by a local ally (like the UPN, replacing the PP in Navarre). As it has been observed for the CISNS, the agenda setting has turned into a source of controversy between the Government and the politically hostile Communities.

**Table 3 - The NHS Interterritorial Council (CISNS) - Central Government-Autonomous Communities interaction modalities: major conflicts (2002-2012)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>CG</th>
<th>RG</th>
<th>Interaction Modalities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>PP</td>
<td>PP (8); PSOE (6); CiU (1); CC (1); PNV (1)</td>
<td>Abandonment by PSOE AACC; accusation by the CG of politicization of the Council [April]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>PP</td>
<td>PP (8); PSOE (7); CiU (1); CC+PP (1); PNV (1)</td>
<td>Non agreement of the PSOE AACC, Basque Country and Catalonia on the new common health card, and presentation of an alternative proposal [January] – Abandonment by PSOE AACC, Basque Country and Catalonia: conflict on lack of financial guarantees on central projects [December]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>PSOE</td>
<td>PSOE (8); PSOE (7); PNV+EA+IU (1); CC + PP (1)</td>
<td>Abandonment by PP AACC and request of an extraordinary meeting; conflict on the agenda; accusation of politicization [June] – Boycott by PP Communities and separate press-conference: conflict on the agenda (non-inclusion of items previously agreed in the Delegated Commission); accusation by the CG of ‘partisan struggles’ [September] – Boycott by PP AACC of several second level bodies [from mid-2004]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>PSOE</td>
<td>PSOE (7, then 8 from August); PP (8 up to August, then 7); CC+PP (1, up to May), CC (1, from May), PNV (1)</td>
<td>Boycott by PP AACC of several second level bodies [up to mid-2005] – Temporary abandonment by the PP AACC, separated conference-press, non-approval of previous meeting minutes [March] – Separated conference-press, claim for an extraordinary meeting [June]; Boycott by PP AACC of a preliminary, informal reception organized by the socialist hosting Community [October] – Temporary abandonment by PP AACC, separated conference-press against CG [December]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>PSOE</td>
<td>PSOE (8); PP (7); CC (1); PNV+EA+IU (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>PSOE</td>
<td>PSOE (9); PP (6); CC (1); PNV (1)</td>
<td>Abandonment by PP Communities: conflict on the agenda [December]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>PSOE</td>
<td>PSOE (9); PP (5); CC+PP (1); UPN+CDN (1); PNV+EA+IU (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>PSOE</td>
<td>PSOE (9); PP (7 up to May, then 6); CC+PP (1); PNV (1, up to May)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>PSOE</td>
<td>PSOE (9); PP (6); CC+PP (1); BNG (1)</td>
<td>PP AACC request to exclude abortion reform from the agenda [May]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>PSOE</td>
<td>PP (10); PSOE (2); UPN + PSOE (1); CC (1); CiU (1)</td>
<td>Boycott by the PP AACC: conflict on the agenda (time and object); accusations of ‘political use’ of the Council [June]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>PP</td>
<td>PP (10); PSOE (2); CC+PSOE (1); CiU (1); UPN + PSOE (up to July, 1), then UPN (1); PNV (1); FAC (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own elaboration from several sources. Key: See Appendix (List of Abbreviations). (1) = No. of Regional Governments controlled.
one third of its members). Previous partisan meetings have also been a widespread practice. Table 4 summarises major episodes of confrontation referring to the CPFF activity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>CG</th>
<th>RG</th>
<th>Interaction Modalities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>PP</td>
<td>PP (8); PSOE (6); CIU (1); CC (1); PNV (1)</td>
<td>PSOE AACC request of an extraordinary meeting [September]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>PP</td>
<td>PP (8); PSOE (7); CIU (1); CC+PP (1); PNV (1)</td>
<td>PSOE AACC request of an extraordinary meeting [March]; conflict on budgetary stability goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>PSOE</td>
<td>PP (8); PSOE (7); PNV+EA+IU (1); CC + PP (1)</td>
<td>Conflict on budgetary stability goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>PSOE</td>
<td>PSOE (7; then 8 from August); PP (8 up to August, then 7); CC+PP (1, up to May); CC (1, from May); PNV (1)</td>
<td>Previous PP representatives meetings [September]; Previous PSOE representatives meeting [September]; PP AACC request of an extraordinary meeting [October]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>PSOE</td>
<td>PSOE (8); PP (7); CC (1); PNV+EA+IU (1)</td>
<td>PP AACC request of an extraordinary meeting [January]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>PSOE</td>
<td>PSOE (9); PP (6); CC (1); PNV (1)</td>
<td>Previous PP representatives meetings [June-July]; Previous PSOE representatives meeting [June]; PP AACC request of extraordinary meetings [October]; conflict on budgetary stability goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>PSOE</td>
<td>PSOE (9); PP (5); CC+PP (1); UPN+CDN (1); PNV+EA+IU (1)</td>
<td>Conflict on budgetary stability goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>PSOE</td>
<td>PSOE (9); PP (7 up to May, then 6); CC+PP (1); PNV (1, up to May)</td>
<td>Previous PSOE representatives meeting [April-June]; PP AACC request of extraordinary meetings [July]; conflict on budgetary stability goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>PSOE</td>
<td>PSOE (9); PP (6); CC+PP (1); BNG (1)</td>
<td>PP AACC request of an extraordinary meeting [July]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>PSOE</td>
<td>PP (10); PSOE (7); UPN + PSOE (1); CC (1); CIU (1)</td>
<td>Previous PP representatives meetings [January-July]; Boycott by Catalonia (CIU) and abandonment by Andalusia (PSOE) [August]; conflict on budgetary stability goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>PP</td>
<td>PP (10); PSOE (7); CC+PSOE (1); CIU (1); UPN + PSOE (up to July, 1), then UPN (1); PNV (1); FAC (1)</td>
<td>Previous PP representatives meetings [January-July]; Boycott by Catalonia (CIU) and abandonment by Andalusia (PSOE) [August]; conflict on budgetary stability goals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own elaboration from several sources. Key: See Table 3. () = No. of Regional Governments controlled.

Eventually, the more recent Conference of the Presidents, the vertical, generalist Intergovernmental Arrangement gathering both the autonomic and the central governments Presidents, is to be taken into consideration. Just a few meetings were celebrated since its informal establishment in 2004: in two out of five (the first and the second), health policy was at the centre of the intergovernmental debate. A closer analysis of this IGA makes it clear that – as for the CISNS and the CPFF – most of its summits were surrounded by a climate of strong partisan confrontation between the Government and the Communities ruled by the party in office at the central level, on the one hand, and the Communities controlled by the major opposition party on the other hand. Several pieces of evidence support this claim: as in the previous cases, major divide lines were of partisan nature (and, many times, actors’ strategies were previously defined in party structures). While boycotts and abandonments never occurred, as for the CISNS and the CPFF the definition of the agenda was often an object of controversy, the central Government being accused by the politically incongruent Communities to impose ‘its own’ order of business and to use the Conference just as a ‘showcase’. Table 5 illustrates these dynamics.

Overall, the information collected in this Section has allowed capturing the existence of noteworthy differences in the ways in which intergovernmental decision-making processes typically unfold in the two countries under analysis. While in Italy coalitions active within the intergovernmental arena tend to be made of members of regional executives on the one hand, and central Government representatives on the other hand, in Spain coalitions are often built along the government/opposition divide line: as seen, in many cases, intergovernmental arrangements are converted into arenas simply reproducing the national parliamentary dynamics. The formation of alternative kinds of intergovernmental coalitions in these two countries has been explored by looking at different interaction modalities between regional and state actors when addressing IGR issues by means of Intergovernmental Arrangements. More specifically, several kinds of collective actions have been examined, pertaining to: the
requests of extraordinary meetings or the inclusion of specific items on the agenda; the regional participation to IGAs’ meetings (boycotts and abandonments); prior meetings by groups of IGR actors in view of IGAs’ encounters. In one case, these actions are typically organized by the regional governments as such, while in the other case, the same kind of initiatives tends to be organized by the Regions according to their majority or minority status vis-à-vis the central government.

Table 5 – The Conference of the Presidents– Central Government-Autonomous Communities Interaction Modalities: Major Conflicts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>CG</th>
<th>RG</th>
<th>Interaction Modalities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>PSOE</td>
<td>PP (8); PSOE (7); PNV+EA+IU (1); CC + PP (1)</td>
<td>Request, by the PP AACC, of an additional preparatory meeting and postponement of the plenary session: conflict on the agenda and accusations of ‘improvisation’; presentation, by the PP AACC, of a document with alternative proposals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>PSOE</td>
<td>PSOE (7, then 8 from August); PP (8 up to August, then 7); CC+PP (1, up to May); CC (1, from May); PNV (1)</td>
<td>See Section 6 below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>PSOE</td>
<td>PSOE (8); PP (7); CC (1); PNV+EA+IU (1)</td>
<td>[no meetings]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>PSOE</td>
<td>PSOE (9); PP (6); CC (1); PNV (1)</td>
<td>Request, by the PP AACC, to add nationalist terrorism among the items on the agenda (strategy previously defined with the national party leader).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>PSOE</td>
<td>PSOE (9); PP (5); CC+PP (1); UPN+CDN (1); PNV+EA+IU (1)</td>
<td>[no meetings]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>PSOE</td>
<td>PSOE (9); PP (7 up to May, then 6); CC+PP (1); PNV (1, up to May)</td>
<td>Accusations to the central Government, by the PP AACC, of unilateralism in IGR management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>PSOE</td>
<td>PSOE (9); PP (6); CC+PP (1); BNG (1)</td>
<td>[no meetings]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>PSOE</td>
<td>PP (10); PSOE (2); UPN + PSOE (1); CC (1); CiU (1)</td>
<td>[no meetings]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own elaboration from several sources. Key: See Table 3. () = No. of Regional Governments controlled

These findings seem thus to suggest the existence of a matching between the hypotheses laid out in Section 3 and observed evidence: this latter appears, in other words, ‘congruent’ with theoretical expectations (George and Bennett 2005). It remains to see whether variations in intergovernmental relations can actually be traced back to variations in the features of Intergovernmental Arrangements. This will be the object of the next Section. Before moving to it, looking at the internal developments of the Italian case may provide interesting, preliminary evidence supporting the hypotheses.

It is indeed worth noticing that the unanimity of the so-called ‘regional front’ – apparently resilient, as seen, to any change in vertical and horizontal congruence – clearly came under stress in two occasions (2000 and 2005). Immediately after regional elections (and before the general ones), political affiliation of regional governments seemed indeed to become a factor able to challenge usual patterns of multilateral intergovernmental relations: partisan rather than territorial coalition building made its appearance on the intergovernmental stage, apparently reducing the cross-case differences outlined in this Section. As reconstructed in detail by Ruggiu (2003; 2006; 2011) and confirmed by many IGR actors interviewed, however, the initiatives put in place according to a partisan logic proved, in the end, to be quite extemporaneous, being unable to exert any lasting consequence on the established patterns. In 2000, following regional elections, the winning centre-right coalition explicitly announced its intention to transform the existing institutional intergovernmental arenas into an opposition tool against an incongruent central government, then still ruled by the centre-left coalition13. In an even sharper way

13 After a meeting in which all elected center-right regional Presidents took part along with the national secretaries of the parties composing that coalition, the President of Veneto summarized in the following terms the logic of the intergovernmental strategy agreed with his colleagues: ‘Next months will be hard for the Government. It will have to toll for our advice in the State-Regions Conference’ […] ‘The season of consociationalism is over, so that left and right Regions were forming in any case a common front’ (Le Regioni del Polo sfidano il governo. Al via il coordinamento dei «governatori» della Casa delle Libertà: «Detterremo l’agenda dei lavori di Montecitorio», Il Corriere della Sera, May 5th, 2000, p. 6, translated, emphasis added).
than in 2000, in 2005 the coalition at the opposition at the national level won in the great majority of the Regions. After a meeting between the national leader of the opposition coalition and the newly elected governors, the creation of a permanent coordination board of the Southern regional Presidents was announced. The partisan design of such initiative, supported by the national coalition leader in person, was evident. Several Presidents affiliated to the centre-left coalition stressed unambiguously the importance of their common belonging to the same political side as well as their intention to use such new forum to create ‘favourable conditions’ for the victory of their alliance in next, 2006 general elections.

What is important to stress here is that all major attempts to introduce a partisan divide in the management of IGR – following modalities very similar to those at work in Spain (prior partisan meetings, use by incongruent Regions of the vertical IGA as an opposition tool against the central Government) – turned out to be just a flash in the pan. Both the Conference of the Regions and the State-Regions Conference continued working without significant infringements due to partisan affiliations. All IGR actors interviewed agreed on the very exceptional nature of these events, as well as on their practical insignificance as to the actual functioning of both Italian IGAs. As put by a former regional Health General Director,

no, these were extremist positions, but they did not have any practical effect. I do not remember in the 2000s that there has been such a prejudiced attitude [...] And I believe that on this has weighed [...] the fact that the Presidents of the Regional Governments were there to represent, like the others, the [regional] ‘institution’ as such, and that therefore the institutional belonging to the ‘world of the Regions’ was greater than any other lure, least of all the relationship with the Government! That is, not because the Prime Minister is my friend, then I...[IT9].

Some informants remarked the temporal closeness of these (announced) initiatives with electoral events. In this respect, a former President of the Conference of the Regions stressed

Then, then I have to tell you that these, as usual, were – how to say? – the beginning of the legislatures in which all departed with great enthusiasm, then, taken with the ordinary course of business, these ambitions dissolved… swallowed up by the contingency, the routine… Then, all was led back to the ‘spirit of the Regions’, regardless of any political affiliation [...] [The partisan, adversarial attitude] was then dissolved by routine and the absolute need, instead, to see that our interlocutor was the central State… more than the political faction A rather than the political faction B [IT5].

From the perspective adopted in this paper, it is relevant to underscore that the presence of an articulated system of intergovernmental arrangements did play a part in neutralizing the potential ‘Spanish style’ ‘ politicization’ of the intergovernmental arena. In 2000, the need of a cross-partisan consensus for appointing the new ‘President of the Presidents’ forced regional actors to find an acceptable solution to both partisan sides. In such institutional framework, the candidacy of the powerful President of Lombardy, exponent of the most intransigent line of his coalition, faded quite quickly, in favour of another centre-right regional President (Piedmont). This latter was well known for his more moderate stance on intergovernmental issues, having already played the role of Vice-President of the Conference under a centre-left regional majority (1998-2000). Besides its election modalities, several actors interviewed have also underscored the role played, in first person, by the President of the Presidents, in stopping all initiatives taken outside the established circuit of intergovernmental relations. Although unprovided with constraining powers and acting first of all as a spokesman of the Regions, he actively strove on many occasions to contain the emergence of alternative coordination forums. Finally, the

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14 «Mezzogiorno: Bassolino propone coordinamento regioni del Sud», ADNKRONOS, April 7th 2005.

15 The press release of the new President of the Conference is, from this point of view, highly illustrative of logic ruling this IGA: ‘All the votes have been expressed unanimously — said the newly elected President of the Conference of the Regions […] — as a sign of significant trust and of a strong unitary vocation, for a correct relationship with the Government, whatever it is, on territorial issues. Evidently, an institutional culture hovers in this hall that is not always present in other locations’. «Regioni, Enzo Ghigo nuovo presidente della Conferenza», ADNKRONOS, June 8th 2000; see also «Ghigo a capo delle Regioni, Errani vice. Il ‘governatore’ del Piemonte (FI) eletto all’unanimità: ‘Sarò il presidente di tutti’», Il Sole 24 Ore, June 9th 2000.
Director General of the horizontal arrangement also proposed, as an additional explication of the failure of alternative coordination devices, the lack, by separate groups of Governors, of organizational structures comparable to those – highly structured – already provided by the Conference of the Regions, as well as the relative appeal, to regional actors, of interregional, rather than intra-party or intra-coalition, mechanisms.

To conclude, evidence provided by the within-case analysis of the Italian case seems thus suggesting that Intergovernmental Arrangements were a factor able to play an actual part in shaping the fate of intergovernmental relations patterns (the kind of prevalent conflict lines and actors’ coalitions) in this country. In the next Section, two comparable multi-level decision-making processes – selected from Italy and Spain – will be explored more in depth, so as to test in a more robust way the cross-case relevance of Intergovernmental Arrangements’ variations in ‘structuring’ intergovernmental processes.

6. Two Case Studies: a Closer Examination of Intergovernmental Arrangements’ Role

In this part, an in-depth comparative analysis will be implemented of two health policy intergovernmental decision-making processes in the two countries under analysis: health funding bargaining in Italy (2003) and Spain (2005). By means of purposeful case selection, these two case studies allow for a deeper and more robust exploration – through Process Tracing techniques – of the hypotheses previously outlined. In this way, it will be possible to trace the observed outcomes (the kind of IGR actors’ coalitions) back until the hypothesized causal conditions (the IGAs’ features), and to check for the actual presence (or the absence) of the supposed causal mechanisms. Given the partially exploratory nature of this analysis, Process Tracing should prove helpful also for uncovering potentially relevant alternative or complementary mechanisms, not included in the starting hypotheses.

Case Selection: MSSD

Methodologically, the two cases under analysis have been selected according to a MSSD logic (Przeworski and Teune 1970): that is, trying to keep constant – as much as possible – all those conditions different from IGAs, which, based on the existing literature, may be reasonably assumed as potentially able to affect the outcome of interest. Indeed, as summarised in Table 6, several ‘confounding factors’ – which can be categorised as pertaining, respectively, to the politics, policy and policy dimension of IGr – may be considered as theoretically relevant in shaping both the degree and the kind of conflicts emerging in intergovernmental relations. By purposeful case selection, it becomes possible to single out in a clearer way the ‘formative impact’ (if any) of Intergovernmental Arrangements on the structuring of intergovernmental processes.

Starting from the ‘politics conditions’, the most obvious factor to be taken into account is the partisan affiliation of the interacting executives. Vertical congruence may be conceived of as the coincidence of the party composition of governments across levels. This coincidence may in turn be full, when the same parties compose both the regional and the central government; it may be absent (full incongruence), when no overlap exists; vertical congruence may eventually be partial, in those cases where some, but not all governing parties at one level are also in office at the other level (Stefuruc 2009, 96). Clearly, one could imagine vertical IGR politicization to vary, depending on the proportion of fully, partial, and non-congruent governments composing the intergovernmental arena. Politicization could be expected to be absent or relatively low in case of full vertical congruence between the large majority of governments. By contrast, the split of IGR actors into coalitions built along partisan alignments should be more likely in case of predominance of partial and, even more, of full intergovernmental incongruence. Meaningful, controlled comparison requires therefore the two cases to display a similar level of intergovernmental (in)congruence.

From this point of view, the two selected episodes can be considered as fairly comparable, as long as in both cases most of the regional executives were (at least partially) congruent with the central one. In Italy, in 2003, twelve out of twenty Regions were ruled by coalitions (at least partly) coinciding with
the one ruling at the centre (i.e., Centre-Right)\textsuperscript{16} in Spain, in 2005, in the light of the peculiarities of the Spanish political system, ten out of seventeen Communities could be considered as congruent with the socialist Government in Madrid\textsuperscript{17}. Also considering congruence from an ideological, rather than party composition, point of view, the distance on the left-right axis among subnational governments can be seen as quite similar, being just slightly higher in Italy than Spain\textsuperscript{18} (see Table 6).

Turning now the attention to ‘policy factors’, the existing literature has widely shown that many characteristics of the policies at stake may have an influence, a shaping effect, on the way in which IGR do unfold. Limiting the analysis to just one policy field – health care – can be seen as a first step in order to reduce extraneous variance due to policy variations. However, within the very large field of any subject-related policy, the features of the specific issues to be addressed are likely to play a relevant role in shaping the conflict potentially emerging in intergovernmental policy-making, as in any other decision-making process. In sum, as well known, policy may be able to ‘determine politics’ (Lowi 1964). Some of the policy characteristics are relevant for determining the degree (more than the kind) of conflict likely to develop both among the sub-national governments, and between these latter and the central one. Each kind of policy is indeed characterized by a different degree of ‘conflict potential’. From this point of view, the key-issue at stake in both selected cases was a redistributive one: how to allocate health policy funds to the regional governments. This kind of policy has the advantage of being, by definition, the most contentious one, and, as such, the most likely to trigger observable tensions and actors’ positioning within the intergovernmental arena. The highly divisive nature of all financial (redistributive) issues was furthermore confirmed by IGR actors interviewed in both national cases. Policies, however, may vary also in respect to other potentially relevant dimensions. Among them, the ideological content of the issues to be debated is evidently a factor which could impact directly on the kind of intergovernmental conflict (partisan rather than territorial) potentially arising. In the health care policy field, this could be the case of highly sensitive matters, such as abortion and euthanasia (as it was actually the case in the Spanish CISNS), and the like. Anyway, in both selected cases the ideological content of the major issue under discussion can be assumed to be exactly the same, that is virtually inexistent. It must be also added that in none of these two cases decisions had to be taken under the pressure of an exogenous, unexpected ‘focusing event’ (such as the ‘mad cow’ crisis or the ‘flu pandemic’), which might be seen as an external condition able to reduce contrasts (both of territorial and partisan nature), by forcing agreement among otherwise non-cooperative governments.

The degree of Europeanization, which could in turn represent an additional external pressure favouring intergovernmental consensus (Börzel 2000, 2002), is, as well known, extremely limited in the health care policy field, which formally still falls – with few exceptions – within the competences of the EU member States (e.g. Greer 2006). Finally, the degree of intergovernmental conflict could be related to the relative saliency of health care policy for regional governments in the two Countries: the higher the saliency and the visibility of a policy, the higher the expected degree of conflict. In this respect, suffice it to remember that healthcare constitutes for both the Spanish and the Italian regional governments the most relevant competence, both in regulatory and budgetary terms.

Eventually, among the ‘polity factors’ theoretically considered able to exert an impact on the relative weight of party political (in)congruence across central and lower-level governments on intergovernmental processes, the major is the form of State. In this respect, the basic argument proposed until now in the literature relies on the so-called ‘shadow of the hierarchy’ hypothesis, meaning that subnational

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\textsuperscript{16} Due to the bipolar logic regulating the electoral competition, while coalitions can be not perfectly internally consistent across the Regions, overlaps between them are almost inexistent.

\textsuperscript{17} Eight Autonomous Communities (the Spanish Regions) were indeed directly controlled by the PSOE (in a single-party government, in three cases, or in coalition with minor partners, in five cases); two more could be considered as partially ‘congruent’ with the central level as long as they were composed of parties providing parliamentary support to the central minority government (so called ‘camouflaged coalitions’: Ştefuriuc 2009)

\textsuperscript{18} Following Bolleyer and Bytzek (2009), the value of the ideological position of each regional executive has been computed as the weighted average of the Comparative Manifesto Project (Volkens et al. 2013) scores attributed to each of the coalition partners in that moment. The weight attributed to each party depends on the number of Councillors representing that party in the regional government (the President is considered as one Councillor). The ’ideological congruence’ in a given year is equal to the Standard Deviation between the values of each government. The higher the standard deviation, the higher the ideological distance between the regional units (that is, the horizontal ideological incongruence), and vice-versa.
governments lacking strong constitutional guarantees would be less prone than full-fledged federal constituent units to engage in partisan conflicts with the central Government. In case of contrast, they would fear, indeed, a unilateral withdrawal of devolved powers by the State (Swedén and Jans 2007; Bolleter et al. 2010, 2014). There is no agreement among scholars on the nature of the Spanish State of Autonomies: while some come to define it as full federal polity (e.g. Sala 2014), others are more inclined to consider Spain a ‘quasi-federal’ State. At the same time, the analysis carried out in the previous Sections has clearly shown that, from a general point of view, IGR managed by means of multilateral IGAs are clearly more unilaterally dominated by the central level in Spain than in Italy. For the purposes of this analysis, I will thus assume both countries not being neither unitary nor full-fledged federal States (Baldi 2007).

To conclude, and as summed-up in Table 6, both selected cases are characterized by the following conditions: a comparable high level of redistributiveness of the key-issue at stake (the allocation of health funds to the Regions by the central Government); comparable levels of ideological content and of Europeanization (both extremely limited, if not virtually absent) and high public saliency; in a context of ‘partial partisan congruence’ of the central Government with the majority of the regional executives (that is, ruled by and/or supporting the same political parties in office at the centre), in the absence of any major external ‘focusing event’.

Table 6 – MSSD Case Selection: extraneous variance kept under control

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conditions</th>
<th>ITALY 2003</th>
<th>SPAIN 2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>POLITICS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vertical Congruence</strong></td>
<td>Central Government: CR; Congruent Regions: CR (12/20)</td>
<td>Central Government: PSOE [+ ERC + IU + BNG + CC + CHA]; Congruent Communities (10/17): PSOE (3); PSOE + IU (1); PSOE + BNG (1); PSOE + PAR (1); PSOE + PRC (1); PSOE + ERC + IU (1); PNV + EA + IU; CC [+ PSOE]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Horizontal Congruence</strong></td>
<td>CR (12); CL (6); Aut + CL (2)</td>
<td>PSOE (8); PNV + EA + IU (1); CC (1); PP (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>POLICY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kind of Policy</strong></td>
<td>Redistributive</td>
<td>Redistributive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Visibility/Saliency</strong></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ideological content</strong></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Europeanization</strong></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focusing Event</strong></td>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>Absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>POLITY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Form of State</strong></td>
<td>Not unitary nor full-fledged federal</td>
<td>Not unitary nor full-fledged federal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Italy 2003**

At the beginning of 2003 the National Minister of Health offered to the Regions a largely renewed formula for the financial estimation of the ‘health need’ of each single Region. In sharp contrast with the allocation formula in force up to that moment, which accorded a relevant weight to the regional population age, the new criteria proposed by the Health Ministry were mostly based on the non-adjusted regional resident population. If implemented, the practical major effect of such reform would have been a massive transfer of financial resources from the older Regions, located mainly in the Centre and in the North of Italy, to the younger ones, concentrated in the Southern areas of the country.

The ministerial proposal had been preceded by a series of public announcements and demands by IGR actors, lasted for more than one year. The first request of revising the allocation formula has come from Lombardy, the country richest Region, ruled by a centre-right coalition congruent with the new Government in Rome. In face of these hypotheses, positions of IGR actors started to differentiate. Strongest, explicit public hostility towards the revision of the allocation criteria came from exponents of two Centre-Northern Regions, characterized by the presence of large shares of elderly population, and historically uninterruptedly ruled by centre-left coalitions: Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany. A typical
‘political patronage’ argument was used to attack the announced governmental plan. At the end of December 2002, although no ad hoc ‘technical commission’ (as promised by the Minister) had been established by the central executive for addressing this issue, the elaboration of a new allocation formula was eventually publicly announced by the Health Minister.

Figure 1 - Italy 2003: Formal intergovernmental decision-making process (main steps).

The main steps of the formal intergovernmental decision-making process are schematically represented in Figure 1. As just sketched, the initiative was taken by the central Government (step no. 1); the following steps are constituted by two meetings of the State-Regions Conference, where the governmental proposal was formally presented to the Regions (steps no. 2 and 3). The fourth step is represented by a meeting of the horizontal IGA (the Conference of the Regions), convened to take a position on the issue19. Step no. 5 concludes the process, by the final decision taken by the State-Regions Conference. In the remainder of this part, I will briefly reconstruct the decision-process, by following the steps just outlined.

The formal confrontation between the central Government and the Regions did not start until the beginning of 2003, when the measure was officially put on the agenda of the State-Regions Conference, called to debate the allocation of the National Health Fund for 2003. This first encounter between the Government and the Regions, entirely devoted to the discussion of the item under analysis, was called on January 9th (step no. 2). It lasted just fifteen minutes, during which, besides some contrasts between the Regions and the Government on the 2002 funds, all actors agreed on the opportunity to recall the Conference one week later, in order to give the Regions enough time to assess the highly innovative Government proposal. The President of the Conference of the Regions also announced that regional

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19 Since 2000, the established practice has been that it is up to the Regions to propose a solution for the distribution of the National Health Fund. As long as this measure must be adopted by means of an ‘understanding’ (intesa), the regional proposal is accepted by the State-Regions Conference only if there is a unanimous regional agreement on it. Otherwise, that is if the Regions are not able to find among themselves a consensus within thirty days from the moment in which the item has been officially put on the State-Regions Conference agenda, the central Government, as for any other intesa, may unilaterally take the final decision: in other words, it may decide to distribute the Fund, based on whatever formula compatible with rather general principles set by Law. Practically, this has meant that every year the Regions have organized monographic sessions of their horizontal Conference with the aim of finding a unanimous agreement on the allocation of health funds. According to all informants interviewed, such a decision represents the most demanding and politically relevant measure the Regions do take by means of their self-coordination arrangement. Usually, these meetings last a couple of days, characterized by an uninterrupted, intense and close-doors bargaining activity. Such features led many newspapers and regional actors to refer to these encounters as to ‘regional conclaves’.
governments would convene separately, as they had always done since 2000, in order to find a unanimous stance on the measure at stake. In spite of the very preliminary nature of the meeting, two conflictive issues emerged, related to the method by which the governmental proposal had been put forward. In a tit-for-tat with Government representatives (the Ministers of Regional Affairs and of Health), the President of Emilia-Romagna (and Vice-President of the Conference of the Regions), complained indeed that the central executive had reversed the established practice (according to which it was up to the Regions to propose alternative allocation formulas), and that the document presented by the Health Ministry was nothing but a poorly understandable table, devoid of any technical attachment (Conferenza Stato-Regioni 2003a). The technicality and the very scientific nature of the Health Minister proposal were the main subjects of controversy of several actors’ public statements following that closed-doors meeting. While the Minister stressed again the scientific objectivity of the new formula, both the President (centre-right coalition) and the Vice-President (centre-left coalition) of the Conference of the Regions called into question the very technicality of that formula. If the former defined the table as ‘lacking scientific bases’, the latter even evoked that it had been designed ‘ex post’: ‘Minister Sirchia must give us the [technical] attachments. The clear impression one feels, by reading the only table they have given to us, is that, actually, an a posteriori reasoning has been followed: first, final figures have been constructed, then [the method] has been reconstructed’.

In the week between the first and the second State-Conference meeting (between step no. 2 and 3), Liguria, a small Northern Region, among those most penalized by the adoption of the ‘per capita’ parameter (being characterized by the highest regional aging index) and ruled by a centre-right coalition, moved on several fronts to mitigate the negative effects coming from the possible implementation of the new formula, favouring, in the view of the President of this Region, bigger (Southern) Regions, with a high number of Ministers in the Government and large fiscal problems. To this end, the President required, and obtained, a unanimous, cross-partisan vote of the regional legislature in defence of the Liguria’s Fund share; the same happened two weeks later in Tuscany.

While the Health Fund allocation was not but one of many items to be addressed on the agenda of the next State-Regions Conference (January 16th), large part of the debate (unusually long) focused on it (step. no. 3 in the Figure; Conferenza Stato-Regioni 2003b). The central government had indeed put forward a second, new proposal, slightly reducing the percentage of the Fund allocated according the non-adjusted per capita parameter, and introducing some further amendments to the original formula. This time, in contrast with the first meeting, divergences became apparent not only between the regional and the central level, but also among the Regions rii-à-rii the central Government. The attempt of the ‘President of the Presidents’ to speak on behalf of the regional level – stressing, again, methodological issues, such as the Regions’ right to propose an alternative solution, and the need of time to assess carefully the latest ministerial proposal – proved in this case unable to hide the evident tensions existing among regional executives on the merits of the governmental document. Explicit actors’ positions aligned along two main divide lines: the younger/older Regions, and the vertically congruent/incongruent ones.

While the spokesman of the horizontal Conference tried to keep the regional front united, the centre-left Presidents and Councillors from the Regions most penalized by the new allocation formula (Centre-North) were the most argumentative during the meeting. President of the Marches (a little Central Region, ruled by a centre-left coalition) asked that a double motivation of the non-understanding with the Government on the new formula was officially reported in the minutes: the lack of inter-governmental agreement, in his view, was due not only to the method followed by the central level (clearly ignoring regional prerogatives), but also to the very content of the proposal under discussion. Such a critique towards the Government document was then supported by other representatives of the centre-left coalition, ruling Central Regions (particularly, again, Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna). The meeting quickly turned into a heated debate between the Health Minister and the representatives of

Emilia-Romagna, a Region characterized by a quite high average population age and uninterruptedl
duly by left-wing parties since 1970. Representatives of Emilia-Romagna firstly evoked that, in the
amended formula presented by the central executive just before that meeting, special favourable con-
ditions had been reserved, in a non-transparent way, to (congruent) Liguria; secondly, they stressed the
methodological incompatibility between the ‘per capita’ criterion and the constitutional duty, by the
Regions, to provide citizens with essential levels of healthcare (the demand of which would be highly
related to the regional population age). In his reply, the Health Minister remarked that Emilia-Romagna
had been unfairly favoured by the allocation parameters designed under the previous (centre-left) cen-
tral Governments. Using the same argument used by Emilia against his own proposal, the Minister
defined as ‘absolutely arbitrary and built ‘ex post’ the formula then in force, elaborated in the second
half of the Nineties under a centre-left government, which would have been based on ‘neither trans-
parent nor intelligent’ criteria. Interviewed on this point for this analysis, the then Minister of Health
confirmed his stance, putting the question in the following terms:

It was a formula constructed in order to favour one’s friends, wasn’t it? [...] A political formula, but
also a dishonest one! Besides being untenable from a mathematical point of view… That is, say, more
generally, it was a wrong formula… [IT7]

Regional representatives from the South at the head of centre-right coalitions (the Presidents of Cal-
labria and Lazio, as well as the Apulia budget Councillor) took instead an explicit stance in favour of
the ministerial proposal. They stressed that the position of the President of the Marches was not to be
intended as the official stance of the Conference of the Regions, and that, by contrast, they welcomed
the opening of a necessary debate on the allocation criteria. Discussion on this issue was eventually
concluded by the Minister of Regional Affairs, according to whom it would have been better if debate
had not entered into the merits of the question, in order to avoid the emergence of a ‘controversy of
political nature’. Such a controversy, however, re-emerged just few days later, when MPs of the main
opposition party (DS -Democratici di Sinistra) presented a parliamentary question to the Health Minister
on the Fund allocation (Camera dei Deputati 2003, 57-59).

As planned, regional representatives finally met in a special, monographic session of the Conference
of the Regions, held two weeks later (step no. 4 in Figure 1). Isolated in a hotel, regional Presidents,
Budget and Health Councillors and technicians convened with the aim of finding a shared, alternative
solution. Given the regional positions on the ground reconstructed above, the perspective of an inter-
regional agreement appeared to many observers as highly unlikely. Just few weeks before, the President
of Liguria had argued:

We will seek, by any means, an agreement, but it is clear that those favoured [by the new formula] will
not be very willing to deprive themselves of the enormous funds that would be allocated to them.22

The then health policy technical coordinator of the Conference of the Regions confirmed that the
interregional search of an alternative solution started, in fact, from extremely unfavourable premises.
In principle, existing tensions could lead to the emergence of several coalitions, which, by breaking the
‘regional front’, would have favoured the adoption of the new formula: a cross-partisan coalition, formed
by all young Regions, irrespective of their partisan affiliations, opposed to the older ones; a partisan
coalition, politically congruent with the central level, formed by both young and old Regions, all ruled
by the centre-right coalition; eventually, a partisan (sub)coalition, including only those Regions charac-
terized by the presence of young populations and ruled by the same coalition in office at the central
level. As summed up by Toniolo et al. (2003),

Tensions on ‘technical criteria’ covered, in fact, political and financial tensions: to be in favour of non-
adjusted capitation or of weighted capitation was probably not determined only by technical-scientific
principled reasons, but especially by being or not a Region with a young or elderly population. This then
combined with other factors apparently not in the game, but in reality very influential, such as the po-
itical orientation of the regional administration with respect to the central government, being located

in areas of greater or lesser economic development, having significant previous financial deficits in regional health budgets. [...] It is very difficult to discuss technical criteria in a truly ‘scientific’ way, without being influenced by your own membership to a Region or to a political part (83-84, translated).

Notice furthermore that, given the consensus requirement for reaching an alternative understanding with the Government, in principle every single Region advantaged by the new formula could exert its own veto power, making in that way the ministerial proposal enter into force: as put by a former regional technical coordinator, these Regions were willing to ‘throw a monkey wrench in the works’ [IT9].

It is under these conditions that the Conference of the Regions started working. A preliminary documents’ file had been prepared by the Conference Secretariat offices, gathering the most relevant information on the issue to be debated, for all those attending the meeting (Conferenza delle Regioni 2003a). The plenary meeting was preceded by an informal select committee. Consistently with the established practices of this IGA, this committee was composed of representatives of a reduced number of Regions representing, in a quite balanced way, all the major interests at stake: political affiliation (five ruled by the centre-right, four by the centre-left coalition); population age and geographical location (three of the North, two of the Centre, and four of the South), as well as the territorial and demographic dimensions. Then, health and budget Councillors, irrespective of their political affiliation as well as of individual financial advantages of respective Regions, commissioned regional technicians (both of the health and the budget Commissions) to try to elaborate, despite the evident difficulty of that task, an alternative document, hopefully able to keep the ‘regional front’ united.

This was just the starting phase of an uninterrupted series of meetings between Presidents, Councillors and technicians, which lasted uninterrupted almost two days. Technicians were continuously tasked by Presidents and Councillors with the simulation of alternative allocation formulas, in order to assess the potential impact of each of these hypotheses on the budgets of every single Region.

The most likely scenario would have been the one in which Regions did split in (at least) two separate groups, letting by consequence the ministerial proposal enter into force. Several actors considered that the Health Minister had exactly bet that Regions, faced with his proposal, would not reach any agreement in the end. Unexpectedly, the interregional decision-making process took a completely different path. After intense negotiations, Regions proved eventually able to find a unanimous, thus cross-partisan, consensus over an alternative allocation formula than the one proposed by the Ministry. After the meeting, the then Health Councillor of Tuscany commented this development in the following way:

The Government wanted to divide us [...] and instead we kept united. We have found an agreement in spite of those who tried to oppose the economic difficulties of the South with the very high average age of the North. Even the Regions governed by the centre-right have agreed to disregard what had been hypothesized by the Minister, and after very long negotiations we have found an intersection point among the various demands23.

Spain 2005

In contrast with previous systems of regional financing, which had envisioned a systematic update every five years, the fiscal arrangement approved in 2001 was designed without including any clause about its revision: it was indeed conceived as a definitive, ‘non-revisable’ system. Very soon, however, the new fiscal architecture appeared unable to provide regional governments with resources sufficient to deal with their functions, particularly with those related to the provision of health care services. The necessity to increase the overall amount of financial resources available to the Autonomous Communities became thus more and more evident to an increasing number of IGR actors between 2004 and 2005.

The first Communities claiming for more money and denouncing the insufficiency of the regional financial means for health care were, in February 2004, that is just one month before general elections, those ruled by the Socialist Party (plus the Basque Country), then incongruent with the PP central Government, which rejected all complaints (Rey del Castillo 2006). Once the PSOE in office at the central level (second half of 2004), however, the number of Communities denouncing the insufficiency of health financing rapidly grew up, coming to include – besides the socialist ones – also those ruled by

23 «Bilanci per la sanità, meno tagli alla Toscana», La Repubblica (Sezione Firenze), February 1st 2003, p. 7.
the PP. The first PSOE Community to reiterate the request of more funds was Extremadura. As reconstructed by Rey del Castillo (2006), roughly in the same period the Madrid Community (PP) was instead the first to introduce the growth of the population (particularly, due to immigration) as the main justification for claiming more money: quickly, such argument turned into the ‘general doctrine’ of the Communities led by the Popular Party. Likewise, Catalonia, ruled by a coalition headed by the socialists, pointed to the increase of its population (jointly with the mismanagement of health policy by the previous CIU regional executive) as one of the major causes of its deficit. While the socialists tended to stress the need of an overall revision of the financing system then in force (passed under the Aznar’s popular Government), the Populars rather highlighted the opportunity of some adjustments, so to take population growth into account. Financing law passed in 2001 had in fact envisioned that, under specific, exceptional demographic circumstances, Communities’ financing could be adjusted.

It is in this context that the problems related to health policy financing were included among the major items on the first Conference of the Presidents’ agenda – the new vertical IGA composed by the Prime Minister and the Regional Presidents (October 2004). In Section 5 the climate of strong partisan confrontation prior to that (unprecedented) intergovernmental meeting has been outlined. On this occasion, the decision taken by the Government together with the Autonomous Communities was to set-up an ad hoc Working Group on health spending (Grupo de Trabajo para el Análisis del Gasto Sanitario) in order to address such issue in a joint way, from a technical perspective. This Group, directly reporting to the Conference, was charged with implementing an analysis – as more complete as possible – of the variables accounting for both the amount and the evolution of regional health spending, through the implementation of a new, homogeneous and transparent information system. Insofar as many Communities had pointed out to demographic factors as those having impacted the most on their budgets, the Conference of the Presidents also agreed on the strengthening of another Working Group, established in September 2004 within the Fiscal and Financial Policy Council (CPFF): it had been tasked with studying the evolution of population in each regional territory (Grupo de trabajo de población, Working Group on Population). To reach their respective objectives, these two groups should have been working in a coordinated way, sharing information and collaborating actively. They should both prepare, by mid-2005, a final technical report. Based on the information contained in these reports, the CPFF should then prepare a basic proposal to be discussed, at a later stage, by a new Conference of the Presidents meeting. The key-issue was thus to assess the impact of different factors (but, particularly, of population growth) on the evolution of regional health spending, so that the best-suited allocation criteria could be designed for distributing resources among the Communities.

To summarize, the key-steps of the (formal) intergovernmental decision-making process started in October 2004 are schematically represented in Figure 2.

*Figure 2 - Spain 2005: Formal intergovernmental decision-making process (main steps).*
Step no. 1 is the first Conference of the Presidents, just discussed; step no. 2 is represented by the work carried out by the two technical Groups tasked with analysing health expenditure growth; step no. 3 is the preliminary meeting of the CPFF, to be called to prepare the proposal to be then discussed by the Conference of the Presidents (step no. 4). Step no. 5, initially not envisioned, consisted in a final CPFF meeting, celebrated to formalize the decisions previously debated within the Conference of the Presidents (this latter being devoid of any legal power).

Despite their assignments, the two technical groups (step no. 2) worked in fact largely separately: the Group on Population just provided the other Group with updated data on regional demographic changes (Moreno 2005). Each of them was of vertical nature, including a number of representatives of the central administration and one representative of each Autonomous Community. The Working Group on Population, established in September 2004 within the Fiscal and Financial Policy Council, concluded its activity, after six meetings, in the first half of 2005. The main results of the analysis carried out by the Group were contained in a final Report. It was argued that while the increase of the Spanish population had been highly heterogeneous across the country, in no Autonomous Community it had been high enough to activate the levelling mechanisms envisioned by the 2001 Law (Ministerio de Economía y Hacienda 2005b). Moreover, in the last years regional financing resulted to have been in line with (if not above) the hypothetical financial needs of each Community, as set in 2001. All Communities dissociated themselves from this point. More generally, several regional Governments made specific remarks on different arguments discussed by the Working Group: the impact of population increase; the effects of immigration; the impact of population aging; the relevance of population dispersion, and so on. One of the major conflict lines was the one between the Communities which had experienced a population growth above the national average and those which instead had been characterized by population increases below that average. The distinction between these two regional groups was partially overlapping with the distinction between the Communities led by the PP (those most affected by population growth, with the exception of Castile and León, and Galicia) and the Communities ruled by the PSOE (with the exception of Catalonia). Representatives of regions not affected by demographic increases were the ones more interested in the inclusion of variables able to adjust the number of inhabitants, such as their territorial dispersion, their aging, and the like (Ministerio de Economía y Hacienda 2005b).

The Working Group on Health Spending was formally constituted in January 2005, and worked until June of that same year, when a final Report was presented. The group was chaired by the Intervención General de la Administración del Estado, and composed of four officials from the Health Ministry, four from the Budget Ministry, and as many regional representatives as the number of the Autonomous Communities and Cities. Because of time limits, the new homogeneous and transparent information system required by the Conference of the Presidents could not be built: the analysis of the Group relied by consequence on existing data, made available by the central and regional administrations involved in that work (Moreno 2005). The working method, initially agreed by the actors, consisted in that Communities could make remarks on the proposals put forward by the Presidency (representing the central level). In the last meeting, a final Report was presented. It was concluded that the population growth could explain just about 20% of the overall increase of regional health spending: the major cause accounting for this latter had to do, instead, with the rise of the per capita expenditure, due, in turn to other factors, such as the introduction of new medical treatments and wage policies (Ministerio de Economía y Hacienda 2005a). Technical discussion, however, had not been able to favour the emergence of a consensus among actors on the content of the conclusions contained in that Report. Actors’ positions were quite mixed. Dissenting remarks on the final Report came indeed from both the Socialist and the Popular Communities. For instance, while socialist Communities like Andalusia contested the age of the population as a variable partly accounting for health expenditure variation, as suggested in the Report, Aragon, ruled by the PSOE as well, was clearly in favour of this criterion. It should be also stressed that the most critical comments were made by (a group of) Popular Communities, which called into question not specific points of the analysis, but the whole methodological reliability of the entire work done by the Group. For this reason, in their view, conclusions contained in the final Report could in no way be taken as the starting point of whatever decision by the next Conference of the Presidents. Particularly, arguments used by Madrid and Murcia (and, in a less extended way, La Rioja) pointed to the methodological weaknesses of that analysis (not complying with the set-up of a new and transparent
information system, as required by the Conference of the Presidents) as well as to the hierarchical control of the Group by the central administration, accused not to share all relevant information with the Communities and to impose its stance on many issues: Murcia spoke in this respect of ‘clearly arbitrary’ decision-taking and working criteria. This is why, according to Madrid and Murcia, which used very similar formulations,

the Report of the Working Group for the Analysis of Health Expenditure, because of its structure and its content, together with the lack of coordination with the Working Group on Population, does not constitute a tool for decision making by the Conference of Presidents nor by the Council of Fiscal and Financial Policy (Ministerio de Economía y Hacienda 2005a, 373-374, translated).

Meanwhile, the technical activity carried out by these two Groups had been paralleled by a harsh conflict between the two major State-wide parties on the very (sequence of) steps to be followed in the intergovernmental decision-making process started in 2004 with the first Conference of the Presidents. In a parliamentary debate held in March, the PSOE defended the path originally established (as represented in Figure 2), whereas the PP claimed for an involvement of both the CPFF and CISNS in the process (this issue dominated the Interterritorial Council activity during all 2005), belittling the role to be eventually played by the Conference of the Presidents: ‘what body of the Administration should address the problem of health financing and define the criteria that will govern the future financing system reform? The answer to this question – as it was efficaciously summarised by El global – depends on the parliamentary group answering it, and remains the major object of controversy between the main opposition party and the one in government’24. In this climate, the national PP leader convened few days later with the Popular autonomous Presidents to warn the central Government against ‘discriminatory treatments’ among Communities: changes to the financial system should have been taken only by consensus and on the basis of a ‘technical investigation’, since such an issue could not be addressed in depth by the Conference of the Presidents25. In July, the health Councillor of the Madrid Community denounced that both the Group on health spending and the one on population growth were in fact nothing but a tool by which the Prime Minister was made able to present whatever kind of decision in the next Conference of the Presidents:

the very place where the Government proposal was designed, according to this regional PP representative, was indeed the PSOE headquarter26.

At the end of June 2005, when both Working Groups had concluded their activity, the central Government finally announced the call of the second Presidents’ Conference in September, with the aim of addressing, as envisioned in the first meeting, the major financial problems faced by Autonomous Communities in health policy. As remarked by several observers, the decision to call the Conference in September (and not in June, as previously scheduled) was partly due to the Government desire that the newly elected socialist President of Galicia (a Community traditionally ruled by the Populairs) would take part in that meeting: in this way, the existence of a majority of Communities politically congruent with the Government would be ensured.

In this phase, diversified territorial interests of each single Community, irrespective of partisan affiliations, were evident. A former adviser of the then Health Minister illustrated that point, by reminding that

for example, when allocation variables were discussed, sparsely populated regions (Castile and León, Castile-La Mancha, among others) lobbied for that variable to be taken into account in the model, and no matter that in a case the PP was in office and in the other case the PSOE was. [SP6]

This contributes to explain the decision taken by the central Government to start a series of informal bilateral contacts with regional leaders, in the period comprised between the announcement of the new

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25 «Rajoy afirma que el PP no aceptará tratos discriminatorios entre las autonomías», Diario Médico, April 6th 2005.
26 «Las CCAA del PP piden a Sanidad que retire el borrador de cartera de servicios e insisten en debatir sobre financiación sanitarias», El médico interactivo, July 1st 2005.
Conference and the actual organisation of this latter (that is, between steps nos. 2 and 3-4). The activation of bilateral contacts – non envisioned in the formal decision-making chain sketched above – could be seen as advantageous, for the national Government, for two reasons: on the one hand, contrasts within its own political side (the PSOE Communities) would be less apparent; on the other hand, some Communities ruled by the main opposition party could be tempted to accept an agreement with the central executive, undermining in that way the possible consolidation of a partisan opposition front.

In fact, after having met with representatives of Communities ruled by the PSOE, the Government organized bilateral meetings with some PP Communities Presidents, particularly those of Balearic Islands, Valencia, and Madrid, the regions characterized by the worst financial conditions. These encounters seemed, at first, to produce the effect of bringing actors’ positions closer, weakening the cohesiveness of the Popular front. In contrast with the official line imposed by the national direction of the PP, representatives of Balearic Islands and Valencian Community appeared indeed ready to accept the principle, set by the Government, that Communities could participate in deficits reduction (basically, by increasing regional taxes), in exchange of a reasonable amount of money accorded by the central level; Madrid reaffirmed instead its own opposition to such a perspective. In face of more and more evident fractures within the popular side, the PP reacted in July by organizing a new meeting of its autonomic Presidents: they convened in the party headquarters in Madrid. The explicit goal of that summit – chaired by the PP national leader in person – was to prepare the next Conference of the Presidents, trying to unify the position of the popular Communities. At the end of that encounter, the official stance of the regional governments led by the PP consisted in asking the Prime Minister to comply with the financial system in force (designed, four years before, by the PP Government), and to activate all the mechanisms envisioned by that system to neutralize the impact of population growth on health expenditure (an element not ascribable to the Communities), without asking the Communities to levy new taxes. Finally, the popular representatives accused the Government to be late in drafting a proposal, because of the difficulties, for the PSOE, to prepare a document agreed on by the Catalan President.

Bilateral meetings of the Prime Minister with several popular regional Presidents continued in the following weeks. The central executive was clearly fearing that the major opposition party would use the approaching Conference of the Presidents – the most visible IGA – as an occasion to stage its hostility towards it: a possible intergovernmental agreement could indeed be interpreted as a success for the Government (and a consequent failure for the opposition). At the beginning of September, a proposal on health deficit reduction was finally made public by the Government, in spite of the agreement according to which it was up to the CPFF to put forward a basic document. It is in this phase that actors’ positioning started to crystallize – although following a rather bumpy path – along partisan lines.

In the days preceding the Fiscal and Financial Policy Council and the Conference of the Presidents, intergovernmental actors took a stance on the proposal announced by the Government according to respective political affiliations. The Populists accused the central executive of ‘ignoring’ the Communities led by the PP, of increasing taxes, and of offering an amount of resources completely insufficient to deal with regional health deficits (no more than a pittance, they said). The total lack of clarity on the criteria used by the Government for allocating these resources among the Communities arouse the PP AACC suspicions on a distribution of the funds biased in favour of the Socialist governments. From a methodological point of view, they also stigmatized that the central Government had not yet circulated among the IGAs’ members all the necessary documentation. On the opposite front, the Prime Minister convened with all socialist regional Presidents in order to hide enduring tensions within the PSOE front. The socialist Communities had indeed offered, at first, a quite weak defence of the Government proposal, arguing that it could be considered as a good starting point, although not a definitive solution; several regional governments led by the PSOE had also made critical remarks on the measures envisioned in that document, Catalonia even announcing its willingness to present a counter-proposal before the Conference of the Presidents. Zapatero, after having assured the socialist regional Presidents that the Government proposal could still be amended, got their unanimous commitment to support all the measures proposed by the central executive in the forthcoming intergovernmental conferences.

One week before the Conference of the Presidents, Zapatero eventually met with the PP leader in person, who, nevertheless, reaffirmed the official opposition of its party against the solutions designed
up to that moment by the Government to address regional fiscal problems. Official intergovernmental activity – that is directly carried out by means of multilateral intergovernmental arrangements – restarted with the celebration of the preliminary meeting of the Fiscal and Financial Policy Council, the forum theoretically assumed to prepare, on the basis of the two Working Groups Reports, the draft-agreement, to be then debated (and, in case, agreed) by national and regional Presidents (step no. 3 in Figure 2). In fact, what was discussed by the CPFF was the document previously prepared by the central Government, and presented, within the Council, by the Budget Minister (chairing this IGA). The debate lasted more than six hours, during which both the popular and the socialist Communities asked for amendments to that document. The representatives of the Communities ruled by the PP also presented a full-blown counter-proposal. At the end, the Minister, who decided not to put that document on vote, committed to include in a new draft-agreement the remarks shared by the largest number of Communities: such decision seemed finally to pave the way for a broadly agreed solution in the approaching Conference of the Presidents.

The climate of partisan confrontation, however, resurfaced few days later, just before the convening of the vertical, generalist Conference. After having met again with their national leader in the party headquarters, the Presidents of the PP Communities denounced that, less than twenty-four hours before the meeting with the Government, this latter had not informed the Popular executives about the innovations introduced in the new proposal of agreement, making impossible for them giving their advice on it. At the end of the party meeting, the budget Councillor of the Valencian Community argued:

Either the Government makes a move on and says exactly, specifying every single point, which is the proposal it is going to bring [to the Conference of the Presidents], or he will not get a positive response by the Communities governed by the PP.27

In case of no response by the Government, the only acceptable solution for the popular regions would have been the one presented by their own representatives at the last CPFF meeting. The second Conference of the Presidents finally took place on September 10th (step no. 4). After a five hours-long debate, actors did not come to any agreement. The document drafted by the Government had been largely amended, leading to an increase of the total amount of resources allocated to the subnational units, as requested by both Socialist and Popular representatives (Rey del Castillo 2006). In spite of the attempt of the Central Government to present the Conference as a big success (a ‘basic consensus’ had been reached, in the Prime Minister’s view), the PP Autonomous Communities distanced themselves from the central Government representation of this summit. In the press conference following the intergovernmental meeting, Popular Presidents – collectively represented by the President of La Rioja, acting as their spokesman – remarked indeed that nothing had been decided, that no agreement had been reached, and that, in case, real decisions had still to be taken by means of the CPFF (the agreements of the Conference of the Presidents being indeed devoid of any legal value). They also criticized the very chaotic and improvised nature of the Conference. The Prime Minister had presented its ‘definitive’ proposal just in the last part of the summit, when the Communities were given a half-an-hour to assess it; Zapatero had then asked autonomic Presidents whether they had any substantive remark on that document: since no one answered, the governmental proposal had been assumed to have been ‘tacitly approved’. From a content perspective, the major political controversies were still on the quantity of resources made available by the central Government to solve autonomic financial problems, considered by the Populars as highly insufficient, as well as on the lack of information on the allocation criteria used to distribute part of these resources.

The last step of the complex intergovernmental decision-making process reconstructed so far, was therefore represented by a new meeting of the CPFF, called to formalize the measures previously discussed by the Conference of the Presidents (step no. 5). The request of a final debate within the CPFF had come particularly from the PP regional Presidents. In their view, it was there, and nowhere else, that intergovernmental agreements could be reached. The PP announced indeed that its final vote

would depend on the specific allocation criteria formally set in that Council: the Secretary General of the Populars restated that there were still numerous uncertainties about these criteria, and that the PP were not willing to accept that some Communities would be favoured over others by the implementation of ‘arbitrary criteria’\textsuperscript{28}. The meeting of the CPFF was preceded by a new party summit of the PP budget Councillors. In spite of initial public declarations, Popular Communities were highly divided on the best strategy to follow, some of them assessing quite positively the government proposal. Finally, the compromise solution adopted by the PP representatives was to opt for abstention (while Ceuta and Melilla, ruled by the PP as well, voted against).

After the Council meeting, four out of six popular budget Councillors decided to use the so-called ‘voto particular’ option, a procedure envisioned by the internal rules of the CPFF, allowing for dissenting opinions of single members to be included into agreements adopted by majority. The arguments used by these regional governments to justify their abstention were similar (CPFF 2006, 387-400)\textsuperscript{29}.

**Discussion**

The case studies just reviewed have revealed the existence of large differences in the ways in which the two intergovernmental policy-making processes did unfold. While, at the beginning, the conflicting interests present in the two intergovernmental arenas (the Italian and the Spanish one) were rather similar, the positions taken by the IGR actors at the end of the processes were sharply different. Faced with an initiative taken by the central Government, regional IGR actors did split along a party-partisan divide line in Spain, and a territorial-level divide line in Italy. This occurred in spite of the presence, in both cases, of an initially evident mix of party-partisan and (single) territory-based conflicting interests among these actors. Notice furthermore that in both cases the positive vote of just one regional unit was a sufficient condition for the central executive proposal to be passed.

On the basis of the hypotheses laid out, and thanks to criteria followed for the selection of cases, the relatively different degree of IGR politicization observed could be expected to derive (partly, at least) from: the different levels of institutionalization of the Intergovernmental Arrangements at work in the two countries (H\textsubscript{1}), and/or from their alternative designs (generalist vs. policy-specific) (H\textsubscript{2}) and combinations (just vertical vs. vertical and horizontal) (H\textsubscript{3}).

Starting from the *institutionalization* of vertical arrangements, as shown, these latter are clearly more developed in Italy than in Spain. The State-Regions Conference can hardly be compared to the recently established Conference of the Presidents, nor to the Fiscal and Financial Policy Council. It has also been seen that, to date, the meetings of these Spanish Conferences have been characterized by a quite strong political confrontation among actors, in contrast to the patterns prevalent within the Italian

\[\textsuperscript{28} \text{"Acebes dice que el apoyo del PP a la propuesta sanitaria del Gobierno depende de los criterios de reparto", El Mundo, September 11\textsuperscript{th} 2005.}\]

\[\textsuperscript{29} \text{La Rioja stressed the insufficiency of the amount of resources; the lack of clarity on many aspects of the agreement, particularly those related to the allocation criteria, ignoring the importance of the population growth. Murcia underscored that what had been discussed by the CPFF could not be considered, as it should, a proposal of the Conference of the Presidents (where it had not been voted), but a proposal of the central Government; that such document was characterized by ‘imprecision and lack of transparency’, not only on the composition of the resources devoted to the health sector, but also on the allocation criteria used to distribute part of them among the Communities; that population growth had not been taken into account. Similarly, the Valencian Community, beside stressing the insufficiency of the resources, highlighted that the measures discussed by the CPFF could not be agreed because of the non determination of the resources allocation criteria, so that the ‘Valencian Community still does not know exactly which will be the financial resources it will have available for a proper exercise of its health competences’ (CPFF 2006, p. 394, translated); because of the ‘arbitrariness’ of the solutions envisioned in the agreement, lacking any analytical basis; finally, because of the ‘inequality’ produced by that agreement, as a consequence of the non-inclusion of the population growth among the distribution variables (among those known in that moment, at least). Eventually, the Madrid Community criticized the measures approved by the Council, by putting in evidence: the ‘serious lack of definition and information’, ‘clarity and precision’ about the amount and allocation criteria of a part of the resources allocated by the Government; the overestimation, by the central executive, of the real total amount of resources (considered, anyway, insufficient); the ‘unbelievable’ exclusion of the population growth among the criteria already made public by the Government for the allocation of the largest share of resources: this constituted a full-blown ‘discrimination’ against all those Communities like Madrid, which had experienced high demographic increases.}\]
IGA. In this case too, the Spanish Conference of the Presidents proved unable to appease existing conflicts. The lack of clarity about its very basic rules (on the modalities of approval of agreements and on its role in the broader decision-making process), the absence of any permanent structure of bureaucratic support (all its functioning being strictly dependent on the choices made by the central Government), did in fact contribute to arouse suspicions among the vertically incongruent Autonomous Communities about a possible partisan use of this arrangement by the Government. The Conference could indeed represent just a ‘showcase’ for the central executive, and a way for favouring congruent regional governments, by means of politically biased funds’ allocation formulas. This also partly explains the repeated requests by these regional representatives to activate relatively more institutionalized, existing policy-specific IGAs such as the CPFF and the CISNS. In this context, the two ad hoc Working Groups set-up within the generalist and the policy-specific arrangements to address the matter from a technical perspective were clearly not able to create a climate of mutual trust among IGR actors, based on reiterated interaction and technical expertise. The conclusions of these Groups, reached after just a few meetings and not agreed by several Communities, were in fact disregarded by both the regional and the central level. At the end of this process, the document discussed by the Conference of the Presidents was, in the view of the vertically incongruent Communities, a document prepared by the Government, not by the Conference of the Presidents as such. In this respect, a former regional Health Director General argued that

the role played by the Conference of the Presidents was in fact very limited. The 2005 agreement was designed exclusively by the Central Government, by means of bilateral talks with some AACC, not all. [SP10]

In contrast with the complex formal intergovernmental decision-making process initially agreed by the central and the regional actors, the activity of multilateral vertical IGAs – the Conference of the Presidents, the Fiscal and Financial Policy Council and their Working Groups – was paralleled by informal intergovernmental relations, conveyed through party and government channels. Formal, vertical multilateral arrangements played, in the end, the role of arenas merely confirming decisions previously taken by IGR actors elsewhere. The central Government, by means of bilateral contacts, clearly tried to use a divide et impera strategy. This also explains the final decision of the PP to abstain on the vote in the Fiscal and Financial Policy Council meeting:

this was due to the lack of agreement among the AACC governed by the PP: the new system was still favouring too much some AACC, and hurting others too much [SP10]

At the same time, the advantaged popular Communities could not give a positive vote: in the view of the then Coordinator of the Working Group on Health Spending and Health Minister advisor, the PP ‘abstention occurred only not give an electoral advantage to the PSOE.’ [SP6].

Although, in Italy, as expected, IGR actors did not split into partisan coalitions, it was not the vertical intergovernmental arrangement involved in the process which played a decisive part in exerting on IGR a ‘shielding effect’ from partisan tensions. Despite its higher institutional development compared to the Spanish IGAs, the State-Regions Conference, on this occasion, was basically the arena in which the proposal put unilaterally forwards by the Health Minister (solicited, as seen, by some regional governments) was formally presented to the Regions. In this context, the generalist design of the State-Regions Conference clearly was of no help in bringing IGR actors’ positions closer in the intergovernmental negotiating process. Furthermore, no mixed technical Working Group, although announced, had been established to draft the new formula. In this stage, partisan tensions, in addition to the territorial ones, were quite evident.

From an explanatory point of view, the major relevant difference between cases is thus to be searched by looking at the different systemic configurations of intergovernmental arrangements in the two countries (H₃): the exclusively vertical development of IGAs in the Spanish case, in contrast with the presence of both vertical and horizontal arrangements in the Italian one. In this respect, the comparative analysis seems to confirm that – as suggested by many Spanish observers for the Spanish case – ‘the vertical configuration of the Conference of Presidents in Spain, without a prior horizontal conference, may reproduce the problems of vertical Sectoral Conferences in our country: the participation of the central Government makes it
difficult for the AACC reaching agreements among themselves, so that [generally] there is not a defence of regional interests, but many times of partisan and single territory-based interests’ (García Morales 2009, 114, translated, emphasis added).

In contrast to Spain, where no stable arrangement for interregional cooperation has ever been put in place and regional coordination occurred by means of party channels, in Italy the presence of a highly structured horizontal IGA – directly involved in the process – played in fact a relevant part in downplaying both territorial and partisan tensions existing within the interregional arena, preventing these conflicts to spread in the vertical dimension of IGR (H1). Both the high level of institutionalization of this IGA (H1) and its generalist design (H2) did contribute to defuse interregional tensions. According to several observers, the strength of the belonging feeling to the so-called ‘regional front’ proved eventually higher than individual, short-run regional interests, both from a single-territorial and a political point of view. The Regions finally preferred to show that – if put to the test – they were actually capable to act in a consistent way, as a collective actor, towards the central Government. As explained by the then Health Policy technical coordinator of the Regions,

The Government was certain that its proposal would pass, and at the last minute, in fact, the Regions reached an agreement. […] Because in the end they [the regional Presidents] said ‘it will be better if we present ourselves united, if we safeguard such ability to demonstrate that we are government institutions…’ [IT3]

This logic was clearly summed-up in the words used by the then President of the Conference of the Regions to reconstruct those days of complex negotiations:

In fact, one of the arguments used the most during those nights was: ‘Boys, it is useless to come and ask for money, to fight for our autonomy, that you appeal to the Constitutional Court on that rule, that you appeal… and then, when we must prove to be a body capable of taking decisions, we don’t take them!’ […] that reasoning was the reasoning that, above all, led all to give up a piece of their own advantages… […] The element that pushed even the most recalcitrant Regions to sign the agreement was, clearly, mainly the fact that we had to demonstrate to be a body able to take decisions… [IT5]

In other words, a ‘problem-solving’ orientation, characterized by the appeal to common values and interests, seemed able to constrain the behaviour of individual actors, imposing on many of them ‘sacrifices in terms of individual self-interests’ (Scharpf 1988, 261). In this context, the existence of an experienced, stable network made of regional managers and officials, able to address the issue at stake on the basis of technical criteria, partly contributed to weaken interregional contrasts, and facilitate agreement. Obviously, every single allocation hypothesis was simulated in order to assess its potential impact on regional budgets: to reach consensus, indeed, criteria had to be both technically and politically acceptable to all the actors. Nonetheless, the final agreed solution largely rested on technical arguments. While no universally agreed formula exists for estimating health needs of different populations, and every parameter used to this end may be contested, the allocation agreed by the Regions was not based on purely arbitrary criteria, nor it was lacking any scientific base. As reported by a regional technician interviewed, ‘we worked and we tried to devise solutions – by [using] the most objective criteria as possible – so to mitigate the effects of the ministerial proposal’ [IT9, emphasis added]. As seen previously, one of the most controversial issues in the relationship with the central Government had been represented by the degree of transparency and scientificness of the allocation formulas under discussion. From this point of view, it is interesting to remark that the counter-document drafted by the Conference of the Regions was accompanied with some methodological notes justifying the variables used for the allocation (Conferenza delle Regioni 2003b).

Interregional agreement, however, was made easier also by additional features of the horizontal coordination arrangement. In line with Hypothesis no. 2, the generalist nature of the horizontal intergovernmental arrangement did play a part in shaping regional actors’ behaviour. The non-policy-specific organization of the Conference did allow, as it was hypothesized, for full-blown bargaining, based on inter-sectoral exchanges and compensations among the Regions. As reported by a former regional and ministerial manager, during these negotiations,
when an agreement is to be found, more general variables come into play, in the sense that...you don't reason just about health: so, for instance, I may surrender on health, because on transports, how to say?, I will have an advantage. [The cross-sectorality] of the Conference, when the attendance to the meeting is restricted just to regional Presidents. It is here that they may engage each other on mutual compensations, in order to bring their positions closer, and find a unanimous agreement.

Negotiations were not based exclusively on technical criteria and cross-sectoral compensations. In line with a long-established practice, the allocation deriving from the straightforward application of the (agreed) technical criteria was then partly amended by means of political negotiations among Presidents, so to smooth and reduce distances among the Regions. To this end a (small) portion (defined ‘re-balancing fund’) was subtracted from the total amount of the National Health Fund and redistributed among regional governments to advantage of those getting less money (reducing, in other words, the actual weight of variables). The Regions to be compensated were identified as all those falling under a certain threshold of per capita financing. Such operation, called in the Conference of the Regions’ jargon ‘correction by pencil’ (tapii), in fact did not alter in a dramatic way the distribution otherwise deriving from the allocation formula: in 2003, the amount of resources used to ‘re-balance’ the Fund allocation was equal to about 1.15% of the whole set of resources. In this respect, a former regional President and former Minister of Health, while confirming the importance of this practice, stressed that:

It was a fiction, it was a pretence to justify the deal! To be able to say [to citizens]: ‘I've taken this [share of the Fund]… Okay, I've given up on that, though, [in change] then they had to give me this!’ [IT10]

Overall, the evidence coming from the two cases just discussed has shown that the different ways in which Intergovernmental Arrangements are structured had a significant ‘formative impact’ on the unfolding of intergovernmental policy-making processes. From an explanatory point of view, the most relevant difference between the two cases has clearly to do with the absence of any intergovernmental arrangement at the horizontal level in the Spanish case, in contrast to the Italian one, where such arrangement not only does exist, but is also characterized by a high level of institutionalization, and a generalist design. The within case analysis of the Italian policy-making process has indeed shown that it was within this arrangement that some of the hypothesized causal mechanisms were actually at work.

At the same time, the exploration of these two cases seems to suggest that other features of intergovernmental arrangements – in addition to those explicitly considered in the analysis – could have a not negligible impact in structuring intergovernmental processes.

Firstly, a potentially relevant question pertains to the presence of ‘veto players’ within an intergovernmental arrangement, particularly in those based on voluntary cooperation (Heinmiller 2007). Such was the case of the Italian Conference of the Regions. As seen, in the end, no regional government decided to use its veto power. Theoretically, this can also be explained considering the potential consequence of a single veto not only on the specific issue under debate, but on the institution itself. As remarked by Heinmiller (2007), indeed, in this kind of intergovernmental arrangements ‘the partner governments are involved not only in the various distinct policy games over time […] but they are also involved in an ongoing, embedded game concerning the continued existence of the institution itself […] their actions in one of these games can have important implications for the other and the linkage between them is particularly intimate because of the fundamentally cooperative basis of the institution’ (670). In the Italian case, regional actors clearly perceived the issue at stake higher than just the one related to the allocation of the Health Fund. Such mechanism was further amplified by the generalist design of the arrangement. It was indeed evident to these actors that the potential incapacity of the Regions to act in a consistent collective way towards the central level could have harmful ‘spillover effects’ in many other policy-sectors, making in this way more likely future unilateral initiatives by the central Government.
they [the Regional Presidents] were aware that if the front had broken on a topic like health policy, it would have broken on everything! Now [health]… then, the Transports Fund? And then the rules to get more powers, as Regions, towards the Government […]? [IT3]

While that specific decision could be advantageous to some Regions, the same could not be granted in other policy-sectors or even, in the longer term, in the same policy field. Making the ministerial proposal enter into force would have introduced a risky element of unpredictability on future intergovernmental decisions and weakened, overall, the role played by the Conference of the Regions itself.

Secondly, the two cases, while selected according to the MSSD logic explained above, were as most similar as possible, but not identical. One major potentially relevant difference pertains to the dissimilar visibility of the entire policy-making process in the two countries. As seen, a comparable high level of saliency characterizes health policy in both countries, particularly for the regional governments. However, while in Italy, in spite of the polemics surrounding it, the process followed a more routinized path, in Spain the political saliency of the issue was clearly higher, increasing the likelihood of IGR politicization: to this contributed both the exceptional nature of the Conference of the Presidents (never called before) and, above all, the direct involvement of the Prime Minister in the whole process (starting from the foundation of the Conference itself).

7. Conclusive remarks

Intergovernmental relations are a widespread, common contemporary political phenomenon. Although responding to similar functional pressures, both these relations and the institutional arrangements designed to manage them vary in many respects in different countries and different policy fields. And yet, both intergovernmental relations and arrangements still represent a relatively underexplored object of analysis in political science. This paper has tried to make a step forward in the understanding of the complex dynamics concerning the relationships among governments in compound polities, by comparing intergovernmental arrangements – and their role in processing intergovernmental relations – in two highly decentralized European countries, in the same policy field: healthcare in Italy and Spain. More specifically, the present analysis was designed to determine the consequences of current, observable differences in the intergovernmental arrangements at work in these two countries, where the policy sector under analysis is characterized by a similar level of regionalization, joined with the presence of a National Health System.

This analysis adds to a growing body of literature where intergovernmental arrangements are interpreted not only as the outcome of the incentives produced by different political-institutional settings, but also as institutional factors that – once put in place – become in turn able to affect the unfolding of intergovernmental relations, by exerting a ‘constraining power’ on the behaviour of IGR actors (Simmons 2004; Bollelyer 2009; Heinmiller 2007).

Italian and Spanish cases have provided a good institutional environment in which different ‘formative impacts’ of IGAs on intergovernmental relations could be tested. While sharing many features in terms of institutional and policy scenario, their Intergovernmental Arrangements vary along several dimensions. Assessing IGAs’ ‘formative impact’ may entail the consideration of diverse, alternative consequences on the policy process. In this paper, the aim was to assess to which measure IGAs are able to shape IGR actors’ coalitions: more specifically, to which measure differently organized IGAs are capable to favour the emergence of partisan rather than territorial coalitions.

Two case studies were selected, trying to keep constant as many ‘confounding factors’ as possible, in order single out in a clearer way the possible effects of IGAs. Despite its exploratory nature and the limited number of cases considered, the analysis suggests, in line with previous studies in the field, that the general question ‘Do intergovernmental institutions matter?’ (Heinmiller 2007) can be positively answered. Under similar circumstances, the emergence of a territorial rather than a partisan coalition in the Italian case was actually favoured by the presence of a horizontal arrangement. The very ability of this latter to ‘shape’ regional positioning towards the Government was in turn due to its high level of institutionalization and its generalist design, which activated several causal mechanisms hypothesized: a mix of problem-solving, based on technical expertise and sharing of common interests and norms,
and political bargaining, partly based on cross-sectoral exchanges. At the same time, the analysis highlighted the relevance of two features of intergovernmental arrangements’ organization not considered in the starting phase of the analysis: the particular role of veto players in voluntary arrangements (potentially able to call into question the very existence of the institution itself), and the level of visibility of the Intergovernmental Arrangement in charge of ‘processing’ IGR.

More generally, an issue clearly worthy of being investigated more in depth concerns the level of (multi-level) party discipline present in compared cases, and its interplay with IGAs. This is a quite slippery issue, as such deserving particularly close consideration. In fact, while discipline imposed by political parties on regional actors could be seen just as an exogenous factor, impacting on IGR independently from the IGAs at work, it could also be seen as a factor endogenous to the intergovernmental process itself. In other words, in presence of highly structured intergovernmental arrangements, political parties could refrain from trying to convert the intergovernmental arena into a partisan battleground, being aware of the high likelihood for such a strategy to fail. The meaning itself of party discipline in IGR might also be expected to vary depending on the strength of the intergovernmental arrangements channelling intergovernmental relations. For instance, in an integrated party system as the German one, for a long time prior meetings by so called ‘A’ and ‘B-Länder’ (ruled by vertically congruent and incongruent parties or coalitions), were not to be seen as a factor hampering the reach of consensus by the states. By contrast, they served the task of defusing partisan conflicts (Auel 2014); similarly, as reported by some Italian IGR actors interviewed, the (rarely used) practice of informal preliminary meetings by Councillors affiliated to the same political coalition, is interpreted as a way of favouring, rather than preventing, final consensus. Because of their complexity, further research is needed to address these issues.

Finally, while this paper, given its focus on processes, has only examined the kind of coalitions emerging in the IGR arena, a logical progression of this work would be to test the consequences of different patterns of IGR – their ‘partisan verticalization’ or ‘horizontalization’ – on public policies’ outputs and expenditures. As well-known, the study of the consequences of ‘federalism’ on public policies is a long-established research area (e.g. Pierson 1995; Obinger et al. 2005; Biela et al. 2013). In line with the perspective adopted in this paper, it could be interesting to explore the link between verticalization and what could be called the ‘political patronage’ hypothesis: whether relatively weak institutionalized (multilateral) IGAs are eventually conducive to IGR outputs more politically biased (that is, designed so as to reward or punish regional actors on the basis of political affinity criteria); some empirical evidence from the Spanish case seems in fact consistent with this possibility (e.g. León 2007).

Looking at the consequences of alternative ways of structuring IGR, it would be also worth considering the degree of policy change observable in different intergovernmental contexts. For instance, a likely consequence of IGR horizontalization (joined with consensus decision-making dynamics), such as the one described as typical of the Italian case, could be the tendency to produce ‘lowest common denominator policies’. As originally suggested by Paul Pierson (1995) with specific reference to social polices, in institutional settings relying on joint-decision making – those in which national and peripheral units’ representatives each possesses ‘a substantial capacity for obstruction’ (659) – final decisions could be likely to produce policies reflecting ‘the views of the least ambitious participants in a minimum winning coalition’ (460). In keeping with the theory developed by George Tsebelis, the need of finding an agreement among the regional units, and between these latter and the centre, could have therefore the effect of favouring small, incremental, rather than radical, policy changes, increasing by consequence the likelihood for the status quo to be preserved. By contrast, an arena characterized by a stronger partisan verticalization of IGR could be expected, in the end, to be more conducive – under favourable political circumstances – to the introduction of broader and/or more frequent policy changes. Notice furthermore that both ‘political patronage’ and ‘lowest common denominator’ policies could represent conditions contributing, in turn, to account for the stability of Intergovernmental Arrangements over time: the latter could indeed be characterized by ‘institutional protections’, mechanisms deliberately introduced in the policy design so as to make changes difficult, and preserve over time the power share of each intergovernmental actor involved in the complex policy-making process (Pierson 1995); the former could trigger the activation of mechanisms of increasing returns.
In conclusion, as these few examples have made clear, the broad field of intergovernmental relations and arrangements encompasses a variety of relevant research questions: while many have begun to be dealt with in recent years, so many – at least – remain to be explored.

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**APPENDIX**

**List of interviews with country-experts and IGR actors**

### ITALY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Interview ID</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regional Health Director General (1996-1999), Director General Regional Health Agency (2000-2005)</td>
<td>IT1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Economics Professor (Bocconi University)</td>
<td>IT2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Health Director General and Coordinator of Interregional Health Technical Committee (1995-2005)</td>
<td>IT3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manger of the Health and Social Policy Secretariat Office of the Conference of the Regions (1987-in charge)</td>
<td>IT4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director General of the Conference of the Regions (mid-1980s-in charge)</td>
<td>IT6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister of Health (2001-2005)</td>
<td>IT7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Health Manager (1996-2003) and Director General of the Ministry of Health (2003-2013)</td>
<td>IT8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Health Director General (2003-2006) and Coordinator of Interregional Health Technical Committee (2005-2006)</td>
<td>IT9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional President (2000-2005) and Minister of Health (2005-2006)</td>
<td>IT11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Budget Councillor (2000-2005)</td>
<td>IT12</td>
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### SPAIN

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<tr>
<td>Spanish IGR expert <em>(Collegio Carlo Alberto)</em></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish IGR expert <em>(Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas - CSIC)</em></td>
<td>SP2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish IGR expert <em>(Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia - UNED)</em></td>
<td>SP3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish IGR expert <em>(Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas - CSIC)</em></td>
<td>SP4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish IGR expert <em>(Universidad Complutense de Madrid)</em></td>
<td>SP5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning Director General of the Health Minister and member of the CISNS (2000-2004), Autonomic Director General of Health Planning</td>
<td>SP7</td>
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Main newspapers and news agencies consulted

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<tr>
<td>Il Corriere della Sera</td>
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<td>Il Sole 24 Ore</td>
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<td>EUROPAPRESS</td>
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<td>La Stampa</td>
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List of Abbreviations

- **IGA**: Intergovernmental Arrangement
- **IGR**: Intergovernmental Relations
- **NHS**: National Health Service

**SPAIN**

- **AACC**: Autonomous Communities
- **CISNS**: Consejo Interterritorial del Sistema Nacional de Salud
- **CISFF**: Consejo de Política Fiscal y Financiera de las Comunidades Autónomas
- **BNG**: Bloque Nacionalista Galego
- **CC**: Coalición Canaria

**CDN**: Convergencia de Demócratas de Navarra
- **CHA**: Chunta Aragonesista
- **CIU**: Convergència i Unió
- **EA**: Eusko Alkartasuna
- **ERC**: Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya
- **FAC**: Foro Asturias
- **IU**: Izquierda Unida
- **PA**: Partido Andalucista
- **PNV**: Partido Nacionalista Vasco
- **PP**: Partido Popular
- **PSOE**: Partido Socialista Obrero Español
- **UPN**: Unión del Pueblo Navarro

Table A - Main multilateral IGAs in federal and quasi-federal western countries

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Generalist</th>
<th>Policy-specific</th>
<th>Generalist</th>
<th>Policy-specific</th>
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<td>VERTICAL</td>
<td>HORIZONTAL</td>
<td>VERTICAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>National Governors’ Association (NGA)</td>
<td>First Ministers’ Conference (FMC)</td>
<td>First Ministers’ Conference (FMC)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Annual Premiers’ Conference (APC)</td>
<td>Ministerial Councils</td>
<td>Ministerial Councils</td>
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<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Council for the Australian Federation (CAF)</td>
<td>Council of Australian Governments (COAG)</td>
<td>Council of Australian Governments (COAG)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Premiers Conference (MPK)*</td>
<td>Conferences of Specialized Ministers*</td>
<td>Joint Bundesländer Ministerial Conferences and Councils</td>
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<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>Conference of State Governors (LHK)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Referentenkonferenzen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>Conference of Cantonal Governments (KDK)*</td>
<td>Conferences of Cantonal Directors*</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td></td>
<td>Concertation Committee</td>
<td>Interministerial Conferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Joint Ministerial Committee (JMC – plenary format)</td>
<td>Joint Ministerial Committee (JMC – functional formats)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Conference of the Regions</td>
<td>State-Regions Conference</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>[Conference of the Governments of the Autonomous Communities]*</td>
<td>Conference of the Presidents</td>
<td>Sectoral Conferences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own elaboration from several sources. Key: * = horizontal IGAs providing for the participation of federal/central level representatives; [ ] = met just one time.