ECPR 27th Joint Sessions of Workshop
26-31 March 1999
Workshop on Concertation and Public Policy

Concertation and Agricultural Policy in Italy.

Gianfranco Baldini and Donatella Campus
University of Bologna and Istituto Carlo Cattaneo

First draft: please do not quote without the authors’ permission
Introduction*

The resurgence of concertation in Italy has been evident in industrial relations since the tripartite agreements of July 1993. While at the industrial level the trade unions’ strategy of concertation is now regarded as one of the main means of agreement between the social parts, as concerns agricultural policies concertation has become important only in the last two years, after the Italian agricultural sector underwent a radical process of change. The aim of the paper is to investigate the main developments occurred in agricultural policies in the last two years, and in particular the emergence of concertation between government and farmers’ organisations.

The transformations that affected agricultural policy making in the last years have been fundamental from many points of view. The first important change concerns the consequences of the Italian political transition and especially the disappearance of the Christian Democratic party (Dc). The close links between the Dc and the Small Farmers’ Organisation (Coldiretti) represented for years a fundamental resource for the former - in terms of votes - as well as for the latter - in terms of policies and access to the most important decision-making levels - such as the Agriculture Ministry. Political change has therefore led to a sudden decline of collateralism as the main means of party-interest group links and to its replacement with a more detached and multilateral relation between the government and the agricultural interest groups.

The second aspect regards the acceleration of the EU integration process and the developments of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which has recently received new impulse in the so-called Agenda 2000. The reform of the CAP has indeed posed many constraints over the domestic policy making process.

Other important changes involve the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestal Resources (Ministero delle Risorse Agricole e Forestali) whose existence has been

---

* This paper is part of an ongoing research project on farmers’ unions and change in the agriculture sector in Italy that the authors (Gianfranco Baldini, Baldini@spbo.unibo.it Donatella Campus dc464@columbia.edu) are carrying out at the Istituto Carlo Cattaneo (catt@cattaneo.org), Bologna.
jeopardised by two referenda (in 1993 and in 1997) which asked for its abrogation. The Ministry, which has now been renamed Mipa (Ministero delle Politiche Agricole, Ministry for the Agricultural Policies) still exists, but it is currently undergoing a decentralisation and a radical reform of its competencies in favour of the regions on the one side and of the EU on the other. Another important aspect to be taken into account regards the economic importance of agriculture: although it is undeniable that the sector has become more and more marginalized in the last years (both in terms of number of people employed and in terms of its economic output as % of the GDP) its importance is far from being negligible, especially in some Italian regions.

Starting from these premises, the strategy of concertation in agriculture is to be analysed as an answer to the many challenges faced by all the actors of the agricultural sector in the recent years.

I. Political parties, farmers’ unions and the agricultural lobbying in Italy.

It is certainly true that in the post war years the farmers’ unions developed close links with the parties that were in power in most European countries. As observed by Tracy (1989, p. 233), the parliamentary membership of many parties, usually conservative or Christian Democratic parties- contained a high number of people with farming interests, who were elected with the support of farmers’ organisations.

The degree of autonomy of farmers’ unions from political parties, however, varied depending on different countries. In some countries, unions made clear that their electoral support was conditional on a satisfactory agricultural policy. As a matter of fact, sometimes farmers’ unions fought to obtain income and price guarantees also by adopting strategies that went beyond the parliamentary scene (Tracy 1989, 233-36). For instance, in France, farmers’ organisations obtained concessions from the government not only through the action of their parliamentary representatives, but also by organizing sometimes even violent demonstrations. In the same way, in Britain, the leading organisation, the National Farmers’ Union, was often in disagreement with the government (especially by the 1980s, Jordan et al.)
1994), and, instead of establishing an exclusive alliance with a single party, it rather tried to gain attention from both sides.

In other countries, by contrast, the relationship between farmers’ unions and some parties was closer: in Germany, for instance, the Deutscher Bauernverband (DBV) was so associated to Christian Democratic party (CDU) that ‘demands and objectives articulated by the DVB have effectively determined crucial decisions taken by the Federal Government’ (Hendriks 1991, p.144). In Belgium the main organisation, the Boerenbond, was linked to the Flemish Catholic Party; in Greece the two main farmers’ unions are associated respectively to the parties of the right and of the left; also in Spain and Portugal we can find exemplary cases of links between parties and farmers’ organisations (Grant 1997, pp. 168-71).

In Italy, the link between the Christian Democratic party (DC) and the Confederazione Italiana Coltivatori Diretti (Coldiretti), the major farmers’ union offers the most extreme example of close affiliation. The Coldiretti, which represents small landowners, has always been regarded as one of the main Catholic organisations in Italy, and, as Leonardi and Wertman (1989, 172) pointed out, probably that one which retained the strongest attachment to the DC until this party disappeared in the early 1990s. There are a number of historical and cultural reasons that may explain such a development. In the analysis of the socio-demographic characteristics of DC voters, many scholars stressed that DC has always performed very well among small farmers who are more religious than the average. Especially in the post-war years, the anticommuist appeal (and the consequent defense of private property) drew small farmers to the DC (Leonardi and Wertman 1989, Giovannini 1978, La Palombara 1964). The Coldiretti gave important support to DC in mobilizing the agricultural vote and, in exchange, it gained a number of economic benefits for small farmers.

Paolo Bonomi, the founder of the Coldiretti and of its associated Federazione Italiana dei Consorzi Agrari (a federation of cooperatives) served as president of Coldiretti from 1944 to 1980 and, at the same time, was member of the executive committee of DC. Many DC parliamentary representatives came from the Coldiretti, which had also a large representation within the parliamentary Agriculture Committees and among the top bureaucrats of the Ministry of Agriculture. Sometimes even the Minister himself was a Coldiretti affiliated.
Being the DC the leading party, certainly the Coldiretti was the most influential farmers’ union in determining the Italian agricultural policy. However, also the other farmers’ organisations had clear political connections. For instance, Confagricoltura, which represents the great landowners, has always ensured that its views were represented within the DC and other smaller conservative parties like the Liberal and the Republican parties, while the Confcoltivatori, then renamed as CIA, Confederazione Italiana Agricoltori, was meant as an extension of the Communist party. Such a mutual tangle of interests between farmers’ unions and political parties has to be regarded as a paradigmatic example of collateralism: a mode of governance according to which trade unions are not engaged in a proper collective bargaining, but work through the parties to influence government policies on behalf of their members.

Collateralism was a very fruitful and effective strategy from the end of the II World War to the mid 1970s. In this length of time, to use Tracy’s words, “Bonomi usually obtained the decisions he wanted” (from the DC and therefore from the government). This appears clear by looking at the main post-war policy program, the ‘Riforma Agraria’ (agrarian reform), which consisted of a radical reform of the legislation on the land property and, in general, on the agricultural activities. Namely, the Riforma Agraria’s main objectives were: firstly, to discourage the practice of latifondium (great under-cultivated estates) by establishing a ceiling upon the maximum extension of land property; secondly, to promote small landowners and the formation of cooperatives; thirdly, to help some underdeveloped areas, like Southern and mountain areas. After the 1970s, the decrease of farming population reduced the number of potential DC voters and so weakened the Coldiretti’s strength within the party. Moreover, as Leonardi and Wertman observed (1989, p.235), the establishment of regional governments and their new role in regulating the agricultural sector so that the Coldiretti could no longer be much influential in those regions that were not governed by the DC. Furthermore, the progressive loss of importance of the Minister of Agriculture in implementing and controlling agricultural policies deprived farmers’ unions of an important channel of lobbying.

In the meantime, Italy’s adhesion to Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) set new constraints. The major decision-making arena moved inexorably from Rome to Brussels and the government was not always able to make the common market operate to the advantage of Italian farmers. Although Italian farmers’ unions took part
in the COPA (Committee of Agricultural Organisations) and exerted a lobbying action in Brussels too, clearly they were no more able to condition the Italian agricultural policy to such a great extent as in the past.

In spite of the fact that its decline began in the ‘70s, collateralism survived until the early ‘90s. In the next section, we will try to analyse the factors that led to its dismissal and opened the way to alternative modes of governance, like concertation.

II. From collateralism to concertation: conditions for policy change

As stated before, only in the 1990s conditions were set for a change in the agricultural policy-making, and finally a new approach substituted the established practice of collateralism.

There were a number of factors leading to this new state of things. Consider first the endogenous factors. As it is well known, Italy underwent a radical political transformation in the space of very few years. Especially the party system has deeply changed owing to external conditions, like the end of the Cold War and the crisis of the Communist ideology, and to domestic events, like the so-called ‘Clean Hands’ prosecutions, which charged most of the old political establishment with corruption and bad administration. As a result, some parties completely or almost disappeared (i.e. the Socialist party, the Liberal party, the Republican party etc.), others undertook a process of ideological transformation and were reborn with new names and new programmatic stances (Pci became Pds, Msi became Alleanza Nazionale), and new others surfaced (Forza Italia, Lega Nord). But, above all, the most significant and striking outcome of the 1990s crisis of the political system was the collapse of the DC. Following scandals and public disapproval, the DC, which had been in power uninterruptedly since the end of the II W.W., was dissolved in 1994. Its legacy has been collected and shared among a multiplication of minor parties, whose the largest one, the Popolari, scored only 6,8 % in the last 1996 elections (see D’Alimonte and Bartolini 1997).

Changes affecting the major actors involved in the policy-making process are commonly regarded as a main source of policy change. For this reason, it is believed that events within government, like an administration change (Kingdon 1984, p.160 ff.), may bring marked innovation in the policy agenda and also in the style of policy-
making. Of course what occurred in Italy went beyond an ordinary change of administration or a turnover of governmental personnel, but consisted of a true replacement of the old party system. The magnitude of this revolution accelerated the agricultural policy change in an unusual way. As a matter of fact, policy changes are ordinarily regarded as quite gradual (Sabatier and Jenkins’ Smith 1993) since established policy communities generally tend to preserve the ‘status quo’ even when circumstances are eroding previous privileged arrangements. In this respect, especially farming communities are generally considered as conservative and unwilling to envisage structural changes. In our case, however, the disappearance of DC and the general change of the party system made the farmers’ unions face the loss of their main channel of lobbying. Since it was no more possible to work through the parties to condition the agricultural policy-making, they had to find new viable strategies to defend farm interests.

The result of this change of perspective has been the adoption of policy concertation. In the next section, we will offer a general account of the operation of policy concertation between the government and the unions. Before proceeding, however, some important exogenous factors that have contributed to the dismissal of collateralism should be mentioned.

A major role should be certainly attributed to the financial pressures at both national and European levels. In the post war years, most European countries, and Italy among them, preferred to provide farmers with short-term benefits rather than to embark on long-term plans of structural reforms, which would have met the resistance of farmers’ unions. As Tracy observes (1989), the need for adaptation to the large scale and global changes in agriculture was not promptly recognised and often governments resorted to short-term measures in the hope that the crisis would pass. In such a context, clearly collateralism fitted the bill of farmers’ unions: they saw farmers’ interests in terms of immediate benefits and, until they could get them, they were active in concealing the need for a more extended reform.

Looking at the history of CAP from the Italian viewpoint, we may agree with Ritson and Harvey (1997, p.25) who summarise the situation as follows: “owing to the contrasting structure of Italian agriculture, self-sufficient in products like fruits, vegetables, oil, and wine, but requiring substantial imports of meat, cereals and dairy
produce, the CAP offered an extended market for Mediterranean products, from which Italy could benefit, but high common prices for the Northern products threatened to exacerbate the balance of payment problems which had long confronted the Italian Government”. The necessity of subsidizing the over-production of the northern products made Italy greatly depend on the financial aid from the European Community.

Actually Italy was also among the countries that gained preferential treatment over the CAP distribution of structural funds. However, as it has been observed (Fennel 1997, pp. 401-4), the original intention of CAP structural policy failed in linking together structural and market policies and rather it happened that the two policies were pulling in opposite directions. As regards Italy in particular, it is a common belief that there was scarce far-reaching change in the structure of agriculture in the past years. Rather, farmers have been aided by a policy that has overcompensated them through the compensatory mechanism. The consequence of such a policy has actually been that of encouraging them to continue patterns of farming that may well never be viable in the future.

It should be taken into consideration that the compensatory mechanisms adopted by the PAC will not last forever. Until now the Guarantee section of the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee fund (EAGGF) has represented the largest share of the Community budget. However, the perspective is changing now: in 1996, for the first time in the history of the Community, the farm budget was cut, a clear marker that the agricultural policy objectives are now regarded as subordinate to the EMU goals (Grant 1997, p.225). The EMU requires that the financing of the CAP does not jeopardise the budgetary stability of the Union; therefore, a scaling-down of the CAP is inescapable. Anyway, the agreement on such a matter is likely to be difficult as the current debate among the member states clearly shows. It is hard to predict what the CAP will be in the next years and which tasks will be discharged at national and at regional levels. The Agenda 2000 documents give some suggestions about which direction we are moving toward; however, the debate on the crucial point, the hypothesis of a renationalisation, is still open (Kjeldahl and Tracy 1995; Grant 1997; Fennel 1997). The idea of transferring the financial responsibility of supporting farmers to the member states is a highly controversial issue. Its supporters think that the national administrations would be more efficient and may perform the
job with a smaller waste of resources; its opponents do not take this for granted and especially see a renationalisation as a retreat from the European integration process.

Given the critical state of the Italian agriculture, the reform of CAP will lead the government to face an important challenge. It is clear that structural measures cannot be further delayed. Beyond the European Union financial constraints, which have certainly been the main incentive for change, there are also many other exogenous factors that actually exert an overwhelming global pressure: for instance, the comparative advantage of the extra-European countries in producing grains and cereals; the innovation carried by the new transgenic agriculture and so on. Therefore, a proper structural reform of the Italian agriculture cannot avoid introducing major changes in the agricultural activities: alternative systems of farming should be promoted; land should be diverted to new uses; structural aids to farmers should be reorganized.

Even if these measures are meant to give the Italian agriculture a chance of surviving, they will presumably lead to a certain degree of social conflict. Collateralism avoided conflict and ensured the social harmony for many decades, but at the price of a remarkable waste of resources and delays in structural adjustments. As described at greater length in the next section, concertation has just moved its first steps: we will see whether the social parts will be able to reach an agreement about how the agricultural sector has to be reformed.

III. Farmers’ Unions, government and concertation: an inevitable outcome?

In the previous sections, we have identified two main classes of factors that brought to the dismissal of collateralism: the party system change and the crisis of the agricultural sector, namely, the urgent need for a structural reform. Now we will describe the process of transformation underwent by the main actors involved in the agricultural policy-making in the attempt of following the path which led to the emergence of policy concertation.

The first conditioning factor that favoured the adoption of concertation has been the advent of a more detached relationship between the government and the unions. A clear marker of this gradual development is the emergence of a sort of
“technocratic pattern” in the recruitment of the Agriculture ministers. While, up to the last Andreotti government in 1992, all the ministers were Christian democratic MPs, in all the following cabinets (led respectively by Amato, Ciampi, Dini, Prodi and currently by D’Alema) the minister has always been an expert in agriculture without a clear party affiliation (with the only exception of the short-lived Berlusconi government, whose minister, Adriana Poli Bortone, came from the post-fascist National Alliance (An))\(^1\).

The earthquake that overwhelmed the old party system surely contributed to detach the unions from the political establishment. If all the unions, especially the Coldiretti, had previously taken advantage by the symbiotic relationship with the parties in power, it is true that in the early 1990s they experienced also the negative effects of this affiliation: the scandals related to episodes of corruption within the Federconsorzi and the outbreak of the ‘Clean Hands’ investigation brought to many allegations against the old pattern of agricultural policy making, based on the exchange pattern of the ‘electoral power’ of agriculture (Moyano Estrada, 1995).

Very soon, the unions became aware of the threaten represented by the antiparty feeling that was growing among the Italian citizens and among their own affiliates. Therefore, in order to survive, they were pushed to reshape their own image as truly independent organisations. Adopting a more critical position toward the government served the purpose of stressing this new independence from the political establishment. Should we say that unions have now become totally neutral as concerns political matters? Probably they have not. In 1994 election, for instance, Confagricoltura supported the right coalition, while Coldiretti and Cia were respectively in favour of the centre (Ppi and Patto Segni) and the left (Progressive) coalitions. However, with respect to the past, the major change was represented by the fact that - apart from very few cases - the unions did not enter the electoral arena with their own candidates. This trend was confirmed again in 1996, when the distance between parties and unions appeared more clearly marked. To sum up, it may be argued that, at least since 1994, governments and unions have interacted as independent entities and of course this transformation has been a basic presupposition for the adoption a concertative policy-making.

\(^1\) Alfredo Diana, Agriculture minister in the Ciampi government, is an influent member of Confagricoltura. The current Minister Paolo De Castro is also one of the leading experts in agriculture.
While engaged in the effort of distancing themselves from the parties, the unions were also challenged by another event: the outbreak of the milk-production quotas’ protest in January 1997 (Lizzi, 1997). Feeling that they were victims of an unfair treatment and discrimination, milk producers formed independent and spontaneous movements called as COBAS. The COBAS actually bypassed the traditional functions of the farmers’ and organised several demonstrations, which obtained great attention from the mass media. As a matter of fact, the COBAS’ radical protest was not effective in terms of gaining immediate benefits; however, they were very successful in attracting sympathetic approval from a large part of the farming population. This growing consensus clearly alarmed the farmers’ unions, which were already facing a decrease in their membership, and urged them to regain their prominent role in representing farmers’ interests. It can be therefore argued that the COBAS’ action was another -maybe the most pressing- factor that favoured the emergence of concertation.

A third conditioning factor may be identified in the progressive consensus of the three main unions on a common line of action. From some points of view, the crucial challenge posed by the COBAS worked also as an incentive for the unions to overcome their traditional divisions and to act in a unitary way. Actually this process of convergence had already been -at least tentatively- initiated in the early 1990s as a consequence of the decline of the ideological contrapositions and of the lower significance of the farm size. In the past, the main lines of cleavage between the farmers’ unions were essentially two: on the one hand, the anticommunist feeling kept CIA isolated from the other two unions; on the other hand, the Confagricoltura and the Coldiretti were divided by the fact that they represented different categories of farmers, respectively the great and the small landowners. Regarding the former point, as already discussed, the collapse of the old party system and the diffusion of an antiparty feeling made the ideological differences loose their centrality: therefore, there was no more reason not to try to reach an agreement.

As concerns the latter point, that of the farm size, a further analysis is in order. As mentioned above, Confagricoltura represented the great landowners (latifondisti), Coldiretti was the union of the small landowners and, as its name suggests, of those who cultivate their own lands by themselves, helped only by the family members, and CIA was more diffused among the workers. Italy has always been characterised,
among the West-European countries, by the smallest average farm size. Nowadays, however, although Italy still remains at the bottom of the list in Europe (see “Terra e Vita”, n.5, 5 February 1999), many small farmers have given up, and so the average farm size has increased. Therefore, the unions’ actual distinction has become blurred not only in ideological terms, but also as concerns the characteristics and the needs of their associates. This evolution has surely favoured the development of concertation, as the old divisions have lost their significance. Moreover, this implies that the usual tripartite framework, that is common in the analysis of concertation in the industrial relations (government, employers’ associations and trade unions), does not apply to the agricultural sector, especially in our case, where the differences between the associations tend to be very limited in terms of membership.

Once outlined the conditioning factors that set the stage for the adoption of concertation, we will offer now a brief account of how concertation was established. The unitary demonstration that the three main unions organised in Milan in May 1996, when they asked explicitly for the adoption of concertation also in the agricultural sector, may be identified as the first act. Since this event occurred two weeks after the centre-left victory in the 1996 election, it may be advanced the hypothesis that the centre-left programme of the Ulivo had been somehow perceived as the suitable framework for the take-off of concertation.

Despite the formal willingness to cooperate, the views of the unions were still different on many points, and therefore reaching an agreement took several months. All the unions were somehow affected by the difficulties of concertation in its initial phase. Within the Coldiretti, for instance, the president, Paolo Micolini, one of the promoters of concertation, was brought to resign in May 1997 (see Micolini’s interview, "Il Sole 24 Ore", 9/5/1997). Only in December 1997, 18 months after the Milan demonstration, the Prime Minister, Mr. Prodi, convened the first meeting of the Tavolo Agricolo or Tavolo Verde (Green Table), with the stated aim of planning a new agricultural policy in concertation with the unions. According to Prodi ("Il Sole 24 Ore", 18/12/97), the government met the unions’ requests and decided to call the Tavolo Verde when it realised that the unions were able to advance unitary proposals.

Since the first meeting, the national Tavolo Verde met several other times. Its participants are the Prime Minister, the Minister for the Agricultural Policy, the presidents of Confagricoltura, Coldiretti, CIA e Copagri, which is the association of a
number of small unions, plus a few collaborators and assistants. It is worth noting that when the unions have to release communications to the mass media, just one of the unions’ presidents speaks for all.

In the first months of the 1998, following the first meeting of the national Tavolo Verde, regional tables of concertation were established as well. Currently these regional Tavoli Verdi operate with more or less bimonthly meetings in Emilia Romagna, Piedmont, Lombardy and Friuli Venezia Giulia, that is to say, the most developed agricultural areas in the Northern Italy. The membership of the regional tables reflects the hierarchy of the national one. Members are the assessore all’agricoltura, who represents the regional administration as concerns the agricultural matters and the chief executives of the unions at the regional level (direttori regionali). According to some insiders’ account, the regional Tavoli Verdi are less formal and more flexible that the national one: so it may happen that collaborators and assistants, who are experts of the agenda issues, replace their bosses and take active part in the bargaining. During these meetings many issues are usually discussed, ranging from the fiscal questions, to the allocation of funds to young entrepreneurs, and to more specific problems affecting important sectors of the agriculture of different regions, like wine, oil, milk etc.

IV Determinants of concertation and challenges to the new patterns of agricultural policy-making

The history of concertation in agriculture is still short and very much in the making. It is too soon to say whether concertation will become the most important pattern in the agricultural policy-making. It is also too soon to assess its effectiveness: until now the main result of the national Tavolo Verde has been the cut of the IRAP tax in November 1997. Rather, we should ask another question: As well as there were the conditions for the emergence of the concertation, are there also the conditions for its consolidation and its progress?
To try to answer this question, we will summarise the four main factors that contributed to the rise of concertation and then we will discuss whether these factors might also favour its consolidation:

1) Crisis of parties - diffusion of an antiparty feeling - decline of collateralism - a more detached relationship between parties and unions.

It may be hardly denied that this has been a no-return path. Being the expression of a political system that no more exists, collateralism is an extremely unlikely alternative to policy concertation. However, if a return to the old practise can be excluded, this does not necessarily imply that concertation will prosper in the next years, since its success depends on many other factors.

2) Blurring differences among the unions owing to the decreasing ideological conflict and to the lower importance of the farm size.

Clearly, the unions’ agreement is a key condition to ensure the surviving of concertation. Also in this case, the convergence process seems inescapable as well as it is a common trend also in other European countries. On this point, it may be mentioned Moyano Estrada (1995), who claims that the farmers’ unions are characterised by different ideological discourses: the entrepreneurial discourse is concentrated on the productive outlook rather than on the rural elements (Confagricoltura is quoted among others), the neo-rural discourse focuses on the social role of agriculture following the principle that policies should not only aim at production, but also at the rural development (Coldiretti and Cia). Finally, the fundamentalist discourse implies a return to the old positions of neo-corporatist arrangements with much emphasis on the national agriculture specific features.

In this regard, our inquiry into the Italian unions’ features confirmed that their ideological discourses are becoming more and more similar with a prevalence of the entrepreneurial approach. Also the Coldiretti and the CIA are now more concerned about the production aspects rather than engage in a rhetoric defence of rural values. Therefore, if unions share some general views, we can presume that the present agreement is destined to last for long. Concerning the third typology, the fundamentalist discourse is presently absent from the debate; however, we cannot
exclude it might surface as a new trend especially in parallel with the discussion of the renationalisation of the CAP.

3) **Marginalisation of the agricultural sector** owing to the decrease of its economic importance and of the number of people employed.

4) Changes occurring in the agricultural sector both at national level, with the transferring of most Ministry’s competencies to the Regions, and at the European level, with the ongoing reformulation of the CAP’s objectives.

These last two points concern large-scale economic and institutional changes. Regarding the third point, actually the marginalisation of the agriculture should support concertative agreements, being the Tavoli Agricoli probably the unions’ most viable option to gain attention from the government and the public opinion.

As regards the fourth point, we should make a distinction: concerning the decentralisation of the competencies of the Agriculture Ministry, this appears as a long, complex but well-oriented process. In this sense, the new Minister for the Agricultural Policies in the D’Alema cabinet and former Prodi’s advisor on the agricultural matters, Paolo Di Castro, has much favoured this development. He is actually much involved in the implementation of the Tavoli Verdi and is committed to the regionalisation reform as well (for instance, he has recently supported the regionalisation of AIMA, the national agency that controls the agricultural market, whose elephantine structure much contributed to the difficulties in handling the milk quotas’ issue). By contrast, as observed in the section 2, the CAP reform is still uncertain. Therefore it is really difficult to predict its impact on the future of policy concertation in Italy. Probably the Cap reform will bring the Italian government to embark on long-term plans of structural reform and this might be, at least potentially, a source of social conflict. On the other hand, concertation could be really the appropriate way of keeping farmers’ resistance to changes under control.

A final remark is in order: the general rise of concertation occurred in Italy in the last years involving not only the agricultural sector, but also industrial relations (Regini e Regalia 1997, Compston 1998) might be the indicator of the weakness of the government rather than the evidence of its strength. While in the old partitocratic
system collateralism was the only conceivable way of ruling the policy-making process (through a direct access to power by representatives of the unions, via parliamentary or governmental channels), the transformation of the system has permanently changed the mechanisms of control over the agricultural policies. Parties can no longer command it as they used to do in the past years, nor governments are expected to act without the consent of the social parts.

To conclude, the concertation appears as the only viable and promising option; however, the future directions of the CAP, the structural - and presumably painful - reform that sooner or later Italy must undertake, and the still uncertain political scenario are all variables that can make the difference in ensuring a long and a fruitful life to the Tavoli Agricoli.

REFERENCES:


