2014 European elections: 
Italian politics and the European challenge

One-day Conference hosted by the University of Strathclyde, European Policies Research Centre, School of Government and Public Policy, with the support of the PSA’s Italian Politics Specialist Group

14-15 January 2015 (lunch-time to lunch-time)

CALL FOR PAPERS

In many respects, the recent European elections have provided a significant test for the European Union and for the ‘health’ of the institution of democracy in its Member States.

In the wake of the recent economic recession and the consequent austerity measures, the May 2014 elections seemed tailor-made for a protest vote. Yet, despite being described by political commentators as “the earthquake that shook EU politics”, the results of the election were not as clear-cut as might have been expected. On the one hand, there were positive signs. The long slide in voter turnout was halted (although not reversed) and pro-EU parties, whilst weakened, still managed to achieve a two-third majority in the European Parliament. On the other hand, however, there was also a distinctive shift in Europe’s fault-line from pro- to anti-EU.

Within this context, Italy may appear as an outlier compared to the affirmation of euroscepticism in other countries. Despite the fragmentation of the Italian political landscape – exacerbated by the 2013 electoral results – it was the Democratic Party (a mainstream, pro-EU party) that won a large majority of the vote. In this way, the PD managed to fend off both Beppe Grillo’s anti-EU and anti-establishment MoVimento 5 Stelle and Berlusconi’s Forza Italia. Thus, perhaps unexpectedly, in the 2014 EP elections a large section of the Italian society returned a ‘vote of confidence’ in favour of mainstream party politics, as reflected in the results of the PD. And yet, M5S’s performance was also significant – suggesting that antipolitics feelings have not completely disappeared.

Against this background, examining the recent EU elections, in and through the lens of one its founding members (Italy) promises interesting insights, allowing reflections on the nature of the relationship between nation-states and European institutions in a context of crisis and euro-scepticism, making it possible to shed light on the resilience and re-definition of the Italian political and party system.
The aim of this conference is to offer a timely analysis of the May 2014 election, and the way in which the Italian political system, as well as those of other countries, and the EU institutions, have emerged from it. Whilst focusing especially on Italy, the conference will include sessions dedicated to cross-national comparisons with other EU Member States, both from the Southern periphery and from the North.

Papers are invited which provide reflections on the effects that the May 2014 EU elections have had and are likely to have on the Italian political system and beyond, encouraging both case studies on Italy and comparative analyses. To this end, the organisers welcome paper proposals which fit within the purposes of the following thematic panels:

1) EU ELECTIONS: RESULTS AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE ITALIAN POLITICAL LANDSCAPE (Focus only on Italy)
   
   In Italy, the economic crisis is welded with a fragile political situation. The general election of February 2013 returned a fragmented and destabilised political framework. The European elections therefore can be seen as an opportunity to assess the solidity of the Italian political system and the leverage of its (new) political actors, and to analyse the likely political outlook in Italy’s immediate future.

   Papers submitted within this panel should analyse the results of the 2014 European Elections, focusing on their impact on the Italian political system addressing, conceivably, some of the following questions: To what extent has the Italian political system overcome the political impasse generated by the 2013 general elections? To what extent is Italy at the beginning of a ‘Third Republic’? How have traditional and new political actors performed in the EU elections and why? What type of communications strategies were used by old and new political actors in their campaigns?

2) GOING FORWARD: ITALY BETWEEN INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS AND THE EU (Focus only on Italy)
   
   The economic crisis has dictated the agenda for the governments that have been in power in recent years and has highlighted the necessity of undertaking major institutional reforms, essential for the structural improvement of the economy. Actors outside Italy - e.g. the European Commission, ECB, OECD, IMF, the governments of other EU and non-EU Member States - have been taking an increasingly overt interest in the progress of institutional reforms in Italy and in their content, and have sought to influence the Italian reform agenda and Italy’s performance relative to commitments resulting from the Fiscal Compact. However, the path of reform has not been easy, and has not managed to achieve a balance between the need for long-term constitutional and institutional reform, and providing short term support to the economic and social fabric.

   Papers submitted to this panel should reflect on the institutional reforms that are being planned or introduced, the different political motivations underpinning them, the tensions that they are generating within and outside Italy, their possible unintended effects, and how the reforms may fit within the broader framework of multi-level relationships, from local government to the EU. Papers that consider all aspects of the Renzi constitutional reform bill would be particularly welcome.
3) **EURO-SCEP TICISM, NATIONALISM AND POPULISM** *(Comparative focus)*

Never, as in recent years, has public debate been so animated by populist tensions. In all European countries populist movements and political parties have flourished. For these actors, the European elections have been a useful stage on which to test their public appeal. The European Union itself has been the target of anti-political and antiparty rhetoric, and the focus of a process of re-framing, linked to the accusation of having exacerbated the pressures of the economic crisis through the austerity measures imposed on Member States.

Papers submitted within this panel should provide reflections on Euro-scepticism in a comparative perspective, in order to trace the similarities and differences between Italy and other European countries in light of the EU elections results. Papers focussing on what the European election results tell us about the resurgence of nationalism, populism and anti-EU feelings in Italy and across Europe, and the relationship between the EU and its citizens, also in terms of the perception of the added value of the EU by its citizens, are also welcome.

4) **NORTH/SOUTH DIVIDE AND A NEW EUROPEAN UNION** *(Comparative focus)*

The European Union is a political experiment that now involves 28 countries and is set to expand further in the coming years. However, the integration process is far from complete or uncontested, and the challenge of achieving social, cultural and economic integration and cohesion is far from being resolved. The recent economic crisis has revealed both the fragility and resilience of the European Union’s system, bringing to the surface tensions between and within the Member States, and exacerbating the North-South divide around which much of the euro-sceptic rhetoric in the 2014 European elections campaign was grafted.

Papers submitted within this panel should discuss the political divide between wealthier and less well-off EU member states using data and comparative analyses based on the results of the recent European elections, and discuss the possible impact of such divide and the likely future scenarios, e.g. in terms of reconfiguration of the EU, of its institutions and policies, and the likely impact of this on the interrelation among EU Member States, particularly in terms of bridging the increasing fracture between North and South.

**Paper proposals (max 300 words, with a clear indication of the panel of interest)** should be submitted by 3 October 2014 to Arianna Giovannini, Laura Polverari and Antonella Seddone, from any of whom further details about the conference can be obtained.

The organisers are delighted to announce that the conference will be opened by two prestigious key-note speakers: **Professor Michael Keating** (Professor of Politics at the University of Aberdeen and Director of the ESRC Scottish Centre on Constitutional Change) and **Professor Simona Piattoni** (Professor of Political Science at the University of Trento and ECPR Chair). In addition, the event will be closed by a round-table discussion with invited international speakers on ‘Italy: Between Europhilia and Euro-scepticism’. Journalists from Italian and UK media will also be invited to attend.

**Attendance to the conference is free of charge** but registration will be required (details on how to register will be provided in due course).