



ARENA

Working Papers

WP 04/21

**Europeanization of National Administrations:
an Assessment of the Italian Antitrust Authority
and Environment Agency Cases**

By

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Abstract

During the 1990s, Italian public administration laid the foundation of a new genre of independent agencies and authorities. Whether it represented a “revolution” for the Italian administrative system or just a formal change with few implications for administrative course of action is still not clear. In this paper the cases of the Environment Agency and Antitrust Authority will be analyzed, focusing on the influence of the European Union on changes implemented in Italy. Specifically, we will investigate the extent of linkages between these Italian institutions and the communitarian ones, to the detriment of Italian ministries.

The macro-, micro-, and meso-levels of this institutional dynamic process will be taken into account, along with a review of organizational, managerial and financial features of the institutions. The analysis takes into consideration the EU pressure on the Italian government and bureaucracy (macro-level), the characteristics of the Italian decision-makers (micro-level) and of Italian public administration institutional structures, processes and culture (meso-level). The changes occurring in the distribution of power and responsibilities between the Italian government, the public independent institutions, and the EU will be considered. On the basis of this evaluation some predictions of future development will be posed. Some final considerations will clarify the degree to which EU-Italian independent institutions linkages have been established and the “resistant” behavior of the Italian government.

Keywords:

Europeanization, Agencies, Networks, EU Environment and Competition Policies

Introduction

One of the most important outcomes of the Italian administrative reform during the 1990s was the creation of new institutions characterized by a variable degree of “independence” from the ministries. Some studies have shown that the content and strategy of this reform did not represent a paradigmatic about-turn (Capano, 2003), but rather an evolutionary adaptation to external pressures, mainly from the New Public Management (NPM) approach (Peters, 1997). The NPM approach was characterized by the aim to find new solutions to challenges common to most of the western public administrations, through promoting, among others, privatization, de-centralization, flexibility and more generally suggesting the application of “private” administrative principles to the public realm (Hood, 1991).

Reorganization of the Italian ministries and development of “independent” structures with a consistent degree of autonomy was an explicit result of NPM-inspired reforms occurring in the Italian public administration. In 1999, nineteen “agencies” were created or completely reorganized. I focus my analysis on the Environment Agency (*Agenzia per la Protezione dell’Ambiente e per i Servizi Tecnici - APAT*), which was originally formed in 1993 as *Agenzia Nazionale per la Protezione dell’Ambiente*, with a differing structure and mandate. Concerning the so-called “Administrative Independent Authorities” (independent institutions with regulatory, inspection and safeguarding powers), their existence in the Italian Public Administration goes back to the early 70s. However, the larger share were initiated during the 1990s, including the Antitrust Authority (*Autorita’ Garante della Concorrenza e del Mercato - AGCM*), the other institution considered in this paper.

Reforms of the Italian public administration responded primarily to “ideological” pressures of NPM and to the increasingly pressing problems of administrative inefficiency and public discontent. Adding to this, administrative adaptation to EU requirements as well as the “central penetration of national system of governance” (Olsen, 2002) by European institutions played a role in the process. Before discussing the

concept of Europeanization, it's worth noting that Commission directives may give specific requirements such as the relative independence of national agencies from ministries. The question to consider is whether new patterns of interaction between national agencies and EC executive bodies could bypass national ministries (Egeberg, 2004b). To give a satisfactory answer one must inquire in what respect inter-organizational relations between Italian agencies and ministries may have changed.

Theoretical framework

Europeanization processes have been widely debated among political scientists and management scholars, both from a “top-down” and a “bottom-up” perspective (Börzel and Risse, 2000). Nevertheless, no unambiguous definition of the concept has hitherto been given. Olsen (2002, pp. 923-24) focuses attention on *what* is changing, listing five areas: (i) changes in external boundaries, (ii) development of European-level institutions, (iii) central penetration of national systems of governance, (iv) exportation of forms of political organization and (v) political unification. As Egeberg (2003; 2004a) argues, European integration may both strengthen national coherence and consistency and, under certain conditions, generate a slight disintegration of national political systems. The EU, in order to “govern”, depends on its member states - as “governing power” must be anchored in consensual and negotiated agreements among its components, rather than in authoritative decisions (Kohler-Koch, 2002). Such consensus-building gives relevance to the concept of “networked multi-level governance” within the EU system (Kohler-Koch, 1999). Characteristics of this system include “co-decision-making across several nested tiers of government, ill-defined and shifting spheres of competence and an ongoing search for principles of decisional distribution that might be applied to this emerging polity” (Marks, 1993: 407).

This paper wants to study if a networked governance structure can be applied to EU policy making in the environmental field, assessing the role of the Italian Environment Agency and its relation with the European Environment Agency and the European Commission. The Italian Antitrust Authority case will be analyzed in order to assess if the same considerations can be helpful, considering the relations this institution has developed at the national and European level. In my research I assess the influence administrative traditions may have on these relations (Knill, 1998). What I expect to find is a “European influence” on relations between the Italian administration and EU actors, thus forging a direct link between national agencies and the European Commission (or its agencies) which might by-pass the ministerial structure (Egeberg 2004b).

To single out the factors behind processes of change at the national level, particularly the effects of EU policy penetration of national bureaucracies, the model developed by Olsen (1992) will be used, evoking the macro-, micro- and meso-levels of analysis. *Macro-level* analysis implies that characteristics of the environment can influence structural changes as the latter are dependent on contextual factors and driven by efficient competitive selection (Olsen, 1992, p. 248). Thus, structural change may stem from factors such as instrumental performance, economic competition and technological development. In this logic, inefficient institutions disappear by dwindling support and legitimacy. The *micro-level* effects study relies on the assumption that structures are chosen by the organizations’ decision-makers; thus, change is driven by human intention, willful design and power. Following Child’s assumption (1972), the strategic choice of changing institutional structures implies establishing and modifying structural arrangements, and choosing appropriate performance standards and alternative environments. Institutional structures can be created or modified to reduce transaction costs or because of political authority and power struggles (Olsen, 1992, p. 249). The *meso-level* concentrates on institutional robustness, defined as the impermeability of political and administrative institutions to environmental transformations and purposeful reorganization. Indeed, many scholars (Kaufman, 1976; Kimberly, Miles *et al.*, 1980; Romanov, 1981) consider, from different point of views, institutions as “self-organizations”.

Research questions

This “dynamic simplicity” (Olsen, 1992, p. 249) will be assessed in the paper.

The macro-level is represented by the EU and its capacity to penetrate national governmental structures by means of different tools (e.g., directives; “moral suasion”). At the micro-level, characteristics of Italian decision-makers and their influence on the Italian governmental structure will be discussed. The meso-level refers to the centripetal forces of the Italian Public Administration, both with regards to its formal structure and its administrative culture.

Thus, the independent variables considered are (i) EU policies, in the sense of its administrative policies, and (ii) the EU institutional structure. What I attempt to investigate is in what respect European initiatives affect the Italian administrative structure. Dependent variables are (i) the organization of Italian agencies and authorities and their relative independence from national ministries, and (ii) the type of interaction between agencies, European institutions (primarily the Commission, but also EU agencies) and the Italian ministries.

Cultural influence from what has been called “the hegemonic paradigm” of Italian administrative practice is expected to mediate changes in the relations between Italian agencies and other actors – alongside the hierarchical structure of Italian bureaucracy (Leyland and Donati, 2001). Aspects of the institutional framework, such as its normative basis, distribution of power and authority, hegemonic traditions and so on, may indeed moderate the effects of external changes on institutional structures and routines. Thus, my research will start from the theoretical assumption that European-level arrangements may have transformed the territorial state structure (Kohler-Koch, 1999; Hooghe and Marks, 2001); the scale and quality of these changes, however, being influenced by mediating factors.

Empirically, I will focus on relations developed between APAT and AGCM on one side and corresponding European institutions on the other. In the case of APAT, such institutions comprise primarily the European Environment Agency, the European Commission and other national agencies. With regards to ACCM, the European Commission and other national authorities take precedence. On the basis of these relations I will investigate whether a direct link has been forged between Italian and European actors, thus bypassing national ministries. I will provide some empirical observations concerning APAT and AGCM structures and strategies, and – more specifically – regarding contacts and interactions with ministries vs. EU-level institutions.

Methods and data

The empirical basis of this research is constituted by qualitative data from the relevant institutional archives. The research follows an exploratory design, in which a set of clear theoretical concepts and testable evaluation criteria are crucial. What is expected from this type of analysis is a clear representation of the institutions analyzed, with particular stress on our *a priori* expectations stated above.

Adaptation of national institutions to the European decision-making environment can be documented by official documents and secondary literature. At the European level these sources have been web-site documents, white papers, legislation and other publications. At the domestic level the sources have been web-site documents, reports, and domestic documents concerning institutional budget, structure and organization in general.

As my focus is on structural pressures from the European level, a lot of the relevant information can be found in open sources and official documents. A vast amount of secondary literature about the issues of this paper has also been taken into consideration. Supplementing these sources is a survey of key personnel in the institutions under study, conducted by means of semi-structured questionnaires.

Debates about the pertinence of case study in analyzing Europeanization have not reached an unequivocal conclusion (Andersen, 2003). Nevertheless, applying this method should give the opportunity to develop an “analytical generalization” (Yin, 1989) from the relevant case. Naturally, this approach poses some problems: the difficulty of controlling and testing the effects of unexpected mediating variables, possible biases of the documentary data by the institutions issuing them, and attempts to generate *hic et nunc* scientific conclusions about a *phenomenon* - institutional change - which is by its nature dynamic. Trying to formulate conclusions to an ongoing process of change is always difficult because of the limited time frame and consequent danger of defining as permanent what is just transitory. Properly assessing this possibility is usually a problematic issue: further studies in the future, with a wider sample and a longer time horizon could give an answer to these doubts. In this study, recognizing these shortcomings prevents the aspiration of any definitive conclusions.

Investigating the Italian case: semi-independent Agencies “bypassing” national ministries?

How should one describe the Italian administrative paradigm permeating Italian bureaucracy and its public administration? It is worthwhile to be rather cautious when trying to define an ideology applying to an administrative reality, as sometimes daily practice can be different from the label we try to put on it. Capano (2003) summarized the Italian administrative paradigm as characterized by the perception of law as expression of administrative action, the separation of political decision-making from administrative implementation, the importance of legality, impartiality and neutrality principles, the formal rules as instruments of administrative action, and the attention for organizational structures more than for policies and the control of legitimacy.

The legal paradigm has been considered for decades a shared framework for the entire Italian administrative community. Changes occurring in the Italian public administration during the last twenty years should be interpreted as paying great attention to this point. Re-elaboration of the Italian hegemonic paradigm has involved a shift from the principle

of conformity to law to conformity to NPM ideas, as laid out in the introduction. There was what Capano (2003, p. 795) has called “a normalization of the impact on the hegemonic paradigm”, with the Italian public administration committed to reconciling new principles with old ones, thus rendering them compatible. Factors deeply rooted in the Italian administrative culture influenced the reform, allowing the hegemonic paradigm to survive in a new and revised shape, but not having changed its core structure.

The creation of most of the Italian agencies was a direct consequence of this wave of reforms, apparently causing a “revolutionary” re-modeling of the Italian public administration. This has to be kept in mind when assessing the internal cultures of these institutions, the functions they perform, their relation with ministries, and, not least, the existence of new and autonomous relations between these institutions and possible EU “partners”. The concept of “independent” institutions refers to legal provisions for autonomy in organizational, financial, accounting and personnel policies. In the Italian public administration this juridical transition occurred with the Antitrust Authority, now recognized by a considerable autonomy from political and economic pressures. In general, we can divide the “independent institutions” existing in the Italian public administration into two categories: the “authorities” and the “administrative agencies”. Authorities are characterized by a considerable degree of autonomy: not subjected to governmental directives, they are organizationally as well as financially autonomous¹. A distinguishing feature in terms of autonomy can be found in the election of directors; usually the authorities’ directors are chosen by parliament or by the President of the Italian Republic rather than the government. Government usually does not have any power of deliberation or control over how an authority exerts its duties.

All in all, there are more than twenty “administrative agencies”, dealing with different sectors from environment to health care.

¹ *Organizational* autonomy refers primarily to independence in staff and personnel management rules. Autonomy in a *financial* and *accountability* sense is non-complete, as authorities receive state funding, yet considerable compared with the previous financial direction of these institutions.

Some of the distinctive features of administrative agencies are the following:

- They operate under the ministerial jurisdiction, with policy implementation as their main function;
- Their roles and objectives are stated by law;
- They enjoy managerial as well as financial autonomy, though within the constraints of a prefixed budget;
- They have flexible hiring rules;
- They are obliged to give periodic reports on their activities to the government;
- Their budget is subjected to control by the Supreme Audit Institution.

As argued by Capano (2003), the creation of agencies did not represent a “revolution” in the real sense, its extension quite limited compared with administrative reform in countries such as the UK and New Zealand. Continuity is related to the fact that the organizational format of Italian agencies draws on models already arranged in the past, especially in the 1980s. Moreover, the managerial approach that is manifest in agencies corresponds surprisingly with traditional bureaucratic-ministerial style in Italy.

Results

The Environment Agency: networking institutional relations?

The Italian Environment Agency (APAT) can be defined as the “operative” branch of the Ministry for the Environment. It was created in 1999, its activities in accordance with the traditional rule that “functionaries manage and ministries control” (Morbidelli, 2000). APAT operates on the basis of a three-year program subject to yearly approval, which necessitates full accordance of stated aims, work priorities and budget, to the Environment Ministry directives. At the organizational level, the APAT directorate has a director general and four other members, all nominated by the State and Regional Governments.

APAT is structured by a functional *criterion*: the directorate maintains coordination power over all the divisions, each of them responsible for a different environmental issue. The responsibility of the director general is to manage the relations of APAT with other environmental organizations, at the state, sub-state and European levels (source: APAT). The main responsibility of APAT is to operate as the “hub” of a networked system of linked organizations at the national level and to cooperate with the European Agency for the Environment.

It is possible to identify two distinct levels inside this network and, likewise, two different “hub” organizations, one of them being APAT, the focal point at the Italian level. At the communitarian level the environmental policy development is driven by the DG Environment. Some studies (e.g. see Everson *et al.*1999) have investigated the characteristics of relations between this DG and the European Environment Agency (EEA). In this paper no particular attention will be paid to this issue – however, it is important to underline the debates about the extent of EEA autonomy in relations with the European Commission. The EEA can be considered the “European hub” for Environment policy: its mandate is to provide the European Commission and the member states with accurate information about the environment, in order to facilitate the elaboration and implementation of environmental policies. The EEA operates on behalf of a European network of member state institutions (EIONET). Every member state appoints a National Focal Point (NFP), a hub of the national institutional network, responsible for collecting data and coordinating activities of sub-national institutions.

The structure of the “Italian environment network” is based on six national topic centres (*Centri Tematici Nazionali*, CTN) and 21 regional focal points (*Punti Focali Regionali*, PFR) (source: SINANET). APAT represents on the “European side” the Italian NFP - its representative being nominated by the Environment Ministry and following ministerial dictates – as well as the National Reference Centre, as part of the European Topic Centre network. On the “Italian side”, it operates as the hub of a national network of

environmental institutions and works in a close relationship with the Environment Ministry. This double-sided role of APAT gives the initial impression of a clear separation between its technical and political activities. If this was accurate, the possibilities of “bypass” by creation of a direct link between this agency and European institutions could be possible. If the macro-level influence is taken into account, it could be argued that the creation of APAT and the environmental institutions’ network in Italy might be a consequence of European pressure.

However, the creation of APAT has to be contextualized in the framework of Italian administrative reform occurring in the 1990s: at the micro-level the distribution of power and authority inside the Italian system between the ministry and APAT is completely biased in favour of the ministry. The APAT director and deputy directors are appointed by governmental decision; furthermore, all issues concerning strategy and budgetary resources of the agency are co-decided with the ministry. Ministerial influence has been further enhanced by the centralization of APAT activities over the last years.

In line with Italian administrative tradition, agencies were created and mandated to for “technical” purposes. The continued prevalence of this attitude suggests that no bypassing *phenomenon* has hitherto occurred. Relations between APAT and EEA are limited to purely scientific topics, the government maintaining its role in managing environmental policy development and relations with EU institutions. To assure the coordination of APAT activities at the Communitarian level, the Environment Ministry takes precedence. APAT experts thus attend meetings at EU level at the request of the ministry. Furthermore, the Environment Ministry has recently created its own office in Brussels in order to follow the activities of the DG Environment, adding to its participation in the Italian Delegation. In relations with the Commission, it is usually the ministry that ordains duties and obligations (e.g., informative duties) with APAT confined to a supportive role. APAT participates at the activities of the Council (at the European level) but the experts sent to the meetings and the position they have to support in the Council are decided by the Ministry. Relations with the European Commission are

indirect: as noted previously, a direct relation exists only between the Commission and the ministry. No concrete attempts of bypassing the “controller” – the Environment Ministry – have been successful. The resistance of the Italian bureaucracy to the European pressure for change remains strong.

APAT and the network system created for administering the environment issues in Italy represent an interesting case of Europeanization of a national structure in the sense that the EU model can be compared to the one of the Italian administration. It is not possible to say if this *phenomenon* represents a case of isomorphism (Di Maggio and Powell, 1983) or, more likely, an answer to the European request to implement a structure mirroring the communitarian one. The reaction of the Italian government to communitarian pressures has been to transform the network of regional and provincial institutions with environmental functions, previously reporting to the ministry, into a network of formally independent institutions reporting directly to a centralised technical agency.

In order not to lose political control over environment policy formulation and implementation, the government created a structure without decision-making power, dependent on the ministry from both an organizational, managerial and budgetary point of view. Hence the creation of APAT was quite problematic: its statute was approved only in 2002, and for a short period management of this institution was subjected to an emergency commissioner. To create APAT and to give it the actual structure took quite a long period of time, because it was necessary to harmonize different statutes and already existing structures and to concentrate them in a unique organization.

The Antitrust Authority: a case of institutional independence?

The Italian Antitrust Authority (AGCM) represents a peculiar case in Italian public administration. AGCM is a concrete example of an “independent” institution, as demonstrated by its autonomy in selecting a board of directors. The ACGM is collegially organized, with a president and four co-directors on seven-year, non-renewable

mandates². This board is autonomous in organizational *management* (within the constraints of 50 permanent staff members), *finance* (concerning the state budget) and *accounting* (constrained by external revision of budget).

The Authority has the responsibility to react upon mergers and inter-company agreements substantially reducing competition; it is also to sanction, more generally, abuses of market dominance. AGCM is organized in six sectoral directorates. The Directorate for International Relations, supervised by the president, is responsible for information and consultation vis-à-vis the European Commission as well as other member states' antitrust authorities.

Institutional structure and mandate gives the ACGM a formal guarantee of non-interference from the side of government – in administrative matters. Studying AGCM relations with the European Commission could thus improve our understanding of the developing “autonomisation” of institutions in the Italian public administration. This observation is valid although the resort ministry of ACGM - *Ministero per le Attività Produttive* – play a considerable role at the European level. While ministerial influence weighs heavily in Council decisions, it is the ACGM which is the main Italian actor in preparatory work as well as implementation. In the “formalization” phase of Council deliberations, an ad hoc working group is created, in which the ministerial delegation is supported by ACGM expertise. Such technical support gives considerable leverage in policy formulation, although political approval remains prevalent. In politically sensitive issues it is normally the ministry alone that takes the final decision, taking into account the ACGM position.

EU competition authorities presided over a “soft revolution” on May 1, 2004. Hitherto, this system had been based on a centralized principle according to which exemptions to EU rules should be applied or administered by the Commission³. With the new system,

² This personnel is co-nominated by the presidents of each of the two chambers of parliament.

³ The practices and powers of EU competition policy emanate mainly from Articles 81 and 82 in the Treaty of European Union (ratified 1992).

all enforcers, i. e. the Commission, national competition authorities as well as civil courts, will be thus empowered. Potential overlaps between the EU and national competition laws will be resolved only by the principle of primacy.

A requirement for effective application of this system is the diffusion of a European competition culture and a common administrative approach. With regards to longer-term consequences, one could reasonably expect more efficient law enforcement as well as a potential “re-nationalization” of competition policies. Further studies will be needed to assess more concretely the results. What remains the focus in this article is the possible effect on relations between the European Commission and the national antitrust authorities.

With all enforcers equally competent to apply Articles 81 and 82 of the EU Treaty, the reform envisions a more efficient and coherent application of communitarian law.

This implies a strengthened *vertical* cooperation between the European Commission and national antitrust authorities as well as *horizontally* between the authorities. Cooperation includes the possible exchange of confidential information in anti-trust judicial proceedings. Between the national actors integrated by the EU clear procedures of information and consultation henceforth apply. Furthermore, great emphasis has been put on the avoidance of double competences and unclear legal authority.

In preparation of implementing the reform, a study group has been created, uniting national representatives of old and incoming member states. Established as the European Competition Network (ECN), it was mandated to provide procedures for coordination and information exchange. Creation of this forum exemplifies the strengthening of independent authorities vis-à-vis ministerial rule – although national ministries typically retain rights to consultation⁴. In Italy, an expected result of the new European Competition policy will be a relative decline of ministerial power within this domain.

⁴ This consultation may take different forms, In France, notably, it is the resort ministry that is ultimately responsible in competition issues – hence, the “independent” authority remains essentially non-independent.

The ministry retains control primarily through Council decision-making, whereas in policy implementation authorities increasingly prevail.

Creation of the AGCM is a recent development compared to similar cases in a range of other EU states. The administrative “revolution” of the 1990s in Italy provides the context, combined with specific Commission pressures to professionalize regulation policy. Thus, the ACGM appears both as institutional product of a change in administrative approach and as well-adapted response to EU demands. A driving factor in the process was of course the national political will to reform.

Among various pressures behind the strengthening of the ACGM, influence from the EU level is of particular pertinence to my research. The dynamic effect of EU activism in this field is fairly straightforward. Primarily, the compulsory application of European directives – as well as added regulation policies – pushes national governments to delegate implementation to an autonomous and specialized authority. The ACGM, being assigned this specific task, is provided with little room of maneuver; collaboration and respect of communitarian policy is mandatory. At the national level, the distribution of power and authority in relation to the Government is clearly stated in the statute of the authority. A relatively clear distribution of roles has thus been secured, maintaining the ministerial “last word” in political decision-making. In line with formal provisions, the Authority has made few attempts at establishing separate relations with the Commission, although its aspirations of an autonomous role seem relatively firm⁵.

However, in light of the new framework of competition law, attempts at strengthening relations with the European Commission could be a successful strategy for the Italian Antitrust Authority. In the longer term this relationship could also work to carve out a stronger position for the ACGM within the *domestic* arena. However, the driving forces behind enhanced cooperation are complex. Rather than an overt strategy of the Authority to bypass ministerial influence, it seems more accurate to speak of a response to EU

pressures of harmonization, in pursuit of institutional leverage. Notably, the ACGM may apply EU regulation to support its position, referring to the obligations laid down by a “Europeanized” system of competition policy.

Discussion and conclusions

Is the Commission challenging the internal consistency of national governments by connecting up national agencies (Egeberg, 2004b)? Does the Europeanization *phenomenon* influence institutional dynamics of the Italian public administration? And is it possible to assess the influence of environmental determinism, of institutional choice and autonomy (Olsen, 1992)? As shown above, both the competition and environment policies highlight a three-level relation between the communitarian institutions, the Italian government and the Italian “independent” institutions. At first glance, EU influence on Italian public administration could be interpreted as a driving factor behind organizational change. The “networked” administration put in place by the EU in the environmental field and the EU directives on competition policy exemplify this influence. A plausible consequence of strengthening ties between communitarian and Italian “independent” institutions could be less consistency within the Italian government.

Behind the scenes, however, the reality appears in a different light. The Antitrust Authority was provided with formal autonomy only six years after its creation. Even if its statute guarantees a strong degree of independence, we cannot affirm empirically that its relationship with the DG competition works exclusively, without government interference. “Political” decisions remain within the ministerial domain; significantly, nothing seems to indicate a change in this respect. The new European competition policy opens perspectives for the creation of a network of fully independent national institutions which could enhance the hypothesized “bypass” *phenomenon*. This is in a phase of

⁵ A destructive factor in this search for autonomy is found by Thatcher (2002), who presents evidence of politicized “packing” of the Authority by controlling nomination of the directorial board.

development; whether results will conform to our expectations – or, contrarily, a “re-nationalization” of competition policies will occur - is not obvious at present.

The role of the Environment Agency, on the other hand, is clearer. This agency was established only a few years ago as part of a general administrative reorganization, of which the creation of technically independent institutions was a stated aim.

European influence on organizational design in this field is considerable – yet, if analyzed, the network approach appears deeply rooted in the old system of Italian regional and provincial institutions. With regards to APAT, discerning the influence of communitarian pressures from those emanating from within the public administration is difficult. The impact of the EU on the relation between APAT and the Environment Ministry is low, also because of the unclear relation existing between the European Commission and EEA. The activities of APAT are deeply influenced by the European directives, yet ministerial relations are equally prominent. At the structural level, organizational characteristics of APAT have been decided within the national domain, although partly designed to meet demands of EU environmental policy.

The limited EU impact on institutional features of the Italian public administration does not exclude the fact that considerable changes have occurred in the institutional equilibrium. Thus, though a major structural reorientation in Italy cannot be confirmed, a move towards institutional decentralization and autonomisation is undeniable. Following from this development, some indications point towards “transnational administrative coalitions”. Still, a consistent bypass of national institutions is not supported by my research. In the cases considered, EU pressure is a recurring factor with regards to competition as well as environmental policies. In the environmental field, controversies between EEA and the DG Environment add another element of complexity to the analysis⁶.

In conclusion, one cannot univocally argue the case of a decline of national government coherence. In the environmental field, EIONET, EEA and the national agency all have technical mandates, while APAT is, with the exception of managerial independence,

⁶ Recently, the device of deliberative meetings has been established in this domain, uniting members of national environmental institutions. Notably, a delegate of the European Commission and EEA respectively is always present on these occasions.

under the control of the Environment Ministry. In the case of competition policy, the strong leadership of the DG Competition adds to the mandatory independence of the Italian Antitrust Authority. The regulatory nature of this field makes more likely the existence of a reliable and independent connection between AGCM and the European Commission, remaining, however, within the framework of ministerial influence.

As anticipated in the methodology section, notwithstanding the empirical material collected for this research, further studies involving a longer time perspective could solve some of its shortcomings. Furthermore, an analytical investigation of relations between European and national institutions should be introduced. Elements to be considered include the frequency, the content and direction of these relations - and, where possible, the resources embedded in national institutions – to influence other actors, or to counteract such influence from others.

Acknowledgements

I'm grateful to Professor Morten Egeberg for his helpful support and his extended comments on the paper. I also thank Professor Johan P. Olsen, Dr. Ulf Sverdrup, and Dr. Åse Gornitzka for their many useful comments.

The research has been carried out during my stay at ARENA, UiO as guest researcher from February 2004 to June 2004. The financial support from ARENA, UiO and Cergas, Bocconi University is gratefully acknowledged.

Primary Sources (Interviews)

During the research have been conducted interviews with functionaries of APAT (*Agenzia per la Protezione dell'Ambiente e per i Servizi Tecnici*) – International Relation Office, AGCM (*Autorita' Garante della Concorrenza e del Mercato*) – International Relation Office, and Ministry for the Environment of Italy.

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