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[POST-WAR POLITICS IN ITALY AND THE RISE OF SILVIO BERLUSCONI]

Executive Summary

Silvio Berlusconi was Italy's longest serving Prime Minister since the Second World War. As Prime Minister, he exercised control over the three public television channels in Italy. The combination of a strong political figure that controls large parts of public media and has considerable business interests would be unthinkable in the Netherlands. Berlusconi is surrounded by controversies, varying from conflicts of interests, accusations of multiple charges, his negative statements on the Italian judiciary and his trials. This raises the question on how the post-war Italian political system has contributed to the rise of Silvio Berlusconi”

The political system in Italy after the Second World War was characterised by a number of key elements. Due to their Fascist past, the Founding Fathers of the Italian Republic strove to create an anti-authoritarian and pluralist Italian democracy. Although this idealistic view sounded good, in practice it turned out to be one of the causes of weak and ineffectual government. After the Constitution came into power on the 1st of January 1948, the parliament elections followed on the 18th of April that year. The result of that election was considered determinant for the political development in the post-war period. The Christian Democrats dominated the political system in Italy for 50 years. Despite the constant presence of the Christian Democrats in the government the political system was very unstable with more than 50 governments in 44 years (1948 – 1992).

In the late 60s Italy became an industrialized country. One of the reasons for the successful industrialization was the end of the outdated protectionism. Another aspect in the field of the so-called economic miracle were the low costs for labour. The so called ‘economic miracle’ could not have taken place without the low costs of labour. As a result of its rapid industrialization Italy was in the lead with regard to European economic integration and reached a level to be able to respond positively to the creation of the common market.

In the late 80’s and early 90’s corruption scandals were daily news in Italy. It turned out that these scandals were just a tip of the iceberg. In 1992 the entire corruption system and how it worked was revealed through the Tangentopoli scandal. During April 1992, many industrial figures and politicians, especially from the majority parties but also from the opposition, were arrested on charges of corruption. While the investigations started in Milan, they quickly spread from town to town, as more and more politicians confessed. Italy was shaken by the series of corruption scandals, Tangentopoli and the Clean Hands Campaign. The political system in Italy finally collapsed in 1992 after many years of Christian Democrat rule and led to the end of the ‘First Republic’ in 1993. The demolition of a

system of parties that ruled the country for almost fifty years created a void. It was then that Silvio Berlusconi saw his chance to enter Italian politics by establishing Forza Italia in 1993.

Berlusconi stood for modernization; he used no high-political, non-understandable, phrases like his predecessors. He spoke a language all Italians understood. Furthermore, he was an accessible person, admired by many for his entrepreneurship. In fact, he was a rich business man, owner of AC Milan and the most important commercial TV Channels. With the video message he broadcasted on his own national TV channels as an announcement he would participate to the elections with his party 'Forza Italia', he reached the whole nation. Berlusconi won this election with a remarkable coalition and was Prime Minister for almost twenty years. In a country where a government lasted approximately one year, he managed to be the only Prime Minister who accomplished to complete a full term in government. This appearance of stability is in stark contrast to the controversies surrounding Berlusconi.

In addition to his personality and ability to speak the language of ordinary Italians, he further strengthened his strategic position by framing Forza Italia as a respectable party as part of the European EPP. Forza Italia's assertion that it shares the same roots as the Christian democratic family has long been an argument to gain domestic and international legitimacy after its creation in 1994, especially after its alliance with right-wing parties in the domestic scene. Although he could have capitalized on his position as president of the Council of Europe in 2003, Berlusconi managed to create additional controversy surrounding his person by antagonizing the European Parliament.

Berlusconi's leadership characterized an unusual and dangerous case of conflict of interest, one with serious repercussions for Italian democracy. Berlusconi stepped into politics when the first results of the Clean Hands Campaign became visible. With the position he reached in politics, eventually as prime minister, he achieved immunity and could therefore not be charged for corruption. The collapse of the traditional party system in Italy not only opened the way to economic interests seeking control over government decisions, but also offered unexpected opportunities for the rise of new "political" actors, namely media organizations. Given the role played by media in contemporary democracies, this new actor had easily become the most influential one.

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Introduction

My interest in Italy's political system was raised during the Italian course that was part of my curriculum. The discussion of Italian history and how politics influenced daily life in Italy relates to my general interest in politics, history and languages. Therefore I find it interesting to research how the political system that governed Italy for 50 years fell and how this has led to the rise of Silvio Berlusconi.

Silvio Berlusconi was Italy's longest serving Prime Minister since the Second World War. As Prime Minister, he exercised control over the three public television channels in Italy. In addition to this, he is one of Italy's richest businessmen. Moreover, he owns AC Milan, one of Italy's most successful football clubs. His investment company possesses companies in several branches and the three largest private Italian television stations. The combination of a strong political figure that controls large parts of public media and has considerable business interests would be unthinkable in the Netherlands. Berlusconi is surrounded by controversies, varying from conflicts of interests, accusations of multiple charges, his negative statements on the Italian judiciary and his trials.

Research questions

Throughout this dissertation I will research the following central question:

“How has the post-war Italian political system contributed to the rise of Silvio Berlusconi?”

To come to the answer to this question, I developed several sub-questions:

1. *What are the key elements of the political system in Italy after the Second World War?*
2. *What series of events led to the end of the ‘First Republic’ in 1993? How did the events in Italy’s post-war politics in the period from 1946 to 1993 contribute to the establishment of Forza Italy in 1993?*
3. *How did Berlusconi establish his strategic position and what impact did the governing of Berlusconi and his party Forza Italia have in Italy as well as for Europe in the period 1993-2006?*
4. *What was the media conflict of interest Berlusconi was involved in and what were the consequences for Italian politics?*

Methodology

For this dissertation on the post-war political system of Italy and its former Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, I mostly used desk research. For the theoretical framework, I used the book on Political Research, Methods and Practical Skills from Halperin and Heath (2012). Halperin and Heath stated that: “Research methods are essentially about how to make arguments. Methods help to build upon or synthesize the work of others, to connect up the work of different writers and thinkers with each other.” (Halperin & Heath, 2012, p.2) For my research on the relation between the fall of the post-war political system and the rise in that same period of Berlusconi, primary literature research helped to find the connections, structure and more specific insights on the several events that occurred during those years.

According to Halperin and Heath “There is not always agreement about what constitutes a meaningful and plausible answer to a research question. But we can all agree that our answers should help to generate valid and reliable knowledge about the questions that they address. This requires that answers be developed through a process of inquiry that, at every step, is both self-aware and critical, and the researchers make clear and transparent how their conclusions were reached.” It is therefore that I developed the research question with sub-questions formulated above. These sub-questions will be answered and analysed, through primary literature research, at the end of every chapter and will eventually lead to the conclusion with an answer to the main research question (Halperin and Heath, 2012, p. 3).

According to my original research proposal, I planned to do an interview with an historian, who is a professional on the topic of modern history of Italy. I tried several times to get in contact with Mr. Van Osta through the University of Utrecht, where he is a lecturer. Unfortunately, he did not respond. Therefore, I chose to focus on the literature that is available on the topic and did additional desk research instead of the planned interview.

Literature

I read several books on the political system of Italy and its history. During the Italian course I took, I noticed the objective view of writer Paul Ginsborg in his book ‘Italy and its discontents’. Beside this book I also used research from other authors such as Jaap van Osta and Alexander Stille, as well as book ‘Una Storia Italiana’ Berlusconi’s own autobiography. Furthermore, I watched and analysed the documentary of the Dutch TV program Tegenlicht and read articles on the affairs Berlusconi was involved in. To get an impression what the political party of Berlusconi, Forza Italia, stands for, I visited the website www.forzaitalia.it. On the internet, I also searched news articles in several languages. I read Dutch, British and American articles on the topic of this dissertation. Using articles in various languages and from various countries ensures a more objective view and gives insights on

how Berlusconi was perceived in different countries. For the legislation on certain topics, I read several reports of the Freedom House and consulted the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU.

Research demarcation

The focus of dissertation will be on the main elements that led to the fall of the First Republic in Italy and how Berlusconi used a void in the Italian political system to make enter politics. In the chapter on Forza Italia, I chose not to do research on Berlusconi's new party PdL. The PdL is a relatively new party and therefore not much literature and data can be found on this matter. In chapter 3, on the conflicts of interest of Berlusconi, I chose to focus mainly on his media imperium. Berlusconi certainly has a larger business imperium, besides the media. However, the most influent one for Italian politics is that of the media.

Structure

This dissertation starts with the post-war politics that were a big part of recent political Italy. It was in this period that, with the founding of the new Constitution and the First Republic, a foundation was created for the political system that lasted almost 50 years. Why this post-war political system remained intact for so long, without major changes will be discussed in the first part. The causes of the collapse of the Italian political system in the late 1990s will be explained as well. This will help to get a better understanding of the circumstances leading to Berlusconi entering politics and eventually coming to power in 1994. With this dissertation I will go more into depth in Forza Italia's functioning and how the party of Berlusconi was founded. The impact of Berlusconi's and Forza Italia's rule during many years will be analysed in chapter two as well. Subsequently, in chapter three, the impact of Berlusconi's power in the European Union in those years will be described. Here will be analysed how, despite many controversies in Berlusconi's governing, his actions were still legitimized. In the conclusion of this dissertation an answer to the central research question will be provided.

1. Post-war politics, 1946 - 1993

In this chapter the post-war politics until 1993 in Italy will be explained. In this chapter can be read how the blocked and degenerated political system (dis)functioned, where the Christian Democrats ruled the country until the early 1990s. Many aspects led to the fall of this so-called 'First-Republic' and led eventually to the rise of Berlusconi. These aspects will be explained and analysed in this first chapter.

(Van Osta, 2008) The Republic of Italy is a rather new republic, it was born after the Second World War, on June 2, 1946. For the first time Italians held a free general election in the form of a referendum. In this referendum the Italians were asked to choose between a monarchy or a republic. The outcome of the referendum led to a minor victory, 54 percent, in favour of a first Republic of Italy. They were also asked to vote for their representatives of the Constituent Assembly. (Ginsborg, 2003) The main responsibilities of these representatives were to write the new Constitution of the Republic. The results of this election were a win for the Christian-Democrats, followed by the Italian Socialist Party and the Italian Communist Party. As an aftermath of losing the elections The Action Party decided to disband.

(Ginsborg, 2003) Founder of the Christian-Democrats, Alcide De Gasperi, who was also Prime Minister of Italy from 1945-1953, formed a new government with the Republicans, Communists and Socialists. As from 1945 the Christian-Democrats, in alliance with other parties governed for nearly 50 years.

1.1 The Constitution

The new Constitution of the Republic of Italy went into force on January 1, 1948 after a period of 18 months of negotiating and adjustments. The initiators of the new Republic established one main goal. They wished to avoid any resemblances of a strong fascist state. Therefore the assembly indicated a non-presidential republic. A non-presidential republic means that the president was not to be elected directly by the people, but by the Italian Parliament. The president would not be the Head of the Government, but the Head of State and would have a more ceremonial role instead of official. The president of Italy is elected every seven years by a college consisting of both three representatives from each region and chambers of parliament. Giorgio Napolitano, the current President of Italy, took office in 2006 and was re-elected for another seven-year period in April 2013.

The Constitution of the Republic of Italy represents a standard system of representative democracy. This system is based on two Houses of Parliament: The Senate and the Chamber of Deputies. (Van Osta, 2008) The Chamber of Deputies is elected every five years by a system of comparative

representation based on multi-member electorates.

1.2 Elections in 1948

(Van Osta, 2008) Elections were held in April 1948, followed after the new Constitution that went into force in January of that year. The result of that election was considered determinant for the political development in the post-war period. The Christian-Democrats were the largest party in Italy, with more than half of the seats in the Italian Parliament they dominated Italian politics. The Christian-Democrats governed for 44 years in a row and the Communist Party remained permanent in the opposition. In 1952 Alcide de Gasperi -leader of the Christian-Democrats- presented a new electoral law, the so-called Scam Law. The government introduced a major bonus of two thirds of the seats in the House for the coalition which would obtain at-large the absolute majority of votes. The change was immensely opposed by the opposition, but also by the smaller Cristian-Democrat coalition partners. These parties had no realistic chance for success whatsoever. Therefore the Christian-Democrats were forced by its allies to withdrawal this electoral law. Despite the constant presence of the Christian-Democrats in the government and the Communists in the opposition the average duration of a government was not even a complete year. However, even though the many crises which caused governments to fall, the Christian-Democrats continued governmental power until 1992.

1.3 Economic miracle

In less than twenty years Italy changed from a peasant country and became one of the biggest industrial western countries. Over forty percent of the labouring population was active in the agricultural sector. This changed rapidly and the Gross National Product more than doubled. New productions developed (manufacturing items such as scooters, washing machines, refrigerators etc.) and distributed goods that dominated the world market. At the end of the 1960s Italy (especially Northern Italy) became an industrialized country. In 1971, only 17.2 percent of the labouring population was still active in the agricultural sector. In the late 60s Italy became an industrialized country. This industrialization was mostly in the North of Italy. In 1971, in comparison with twenty years earlier, only 17.2 percent was still active in the agricultural sector. One of the reasons for this success of the industrialization was the end of the outdated protectionism of Italy. (Van Osta, 2008) Italy was in the lead regarding European economic integration and reached a level to be able to respond positively to the creation of the common market. Another aspect in the field of the so-called economic miracle were the low costs for labour. (Ginsborg, 2003) The high unemployment rate in the years 1950 ensured a bigger demand for labour than there was offer for labour. This caused massive migration from the country side to the bigger cities in Northern Italy. As a result of the low labour costs, in combination with low production costs – because Italy had its own resources for energy - Italian companies were very competitive in the international markets.

(Ginsborg, 2001) The economic miracle was also made possible thanks to the measures taken during the period of reconstruction after the Second World War. Due to the strict policy of Luigi Einaudi who was Minister of Finance at the time, the inflation stopped and confidence in the Italian valuta Lira became stronger. Lastly there was the money from the Marshall Plan. This plan was an American initiative to aid Europe, in which the United States gave economic support to help rebuild European economies after the end of World War II in order to prevent the spread of Soviet Communism. (Van Osta, 2008) In Italy the money from the Marshall Plan was not only used to repair damaged fabrics, but also to restructure the cement and steel industry. This was another contribution for the economic miracle.

1.4 Protest and terrorism

(Della Porte, 1995) In 1969 is when the terroristic attacks began in Italy. It was on December 12, 1969 when the Piazza Fontana in Milan was bombed by right terrorists. This attack was the beginning of the so-called ‘strategy of tension’ and became a symbol for black terrorism. The explosion at the Piazza Fontana was one of many events that triggered the development of left extremists. The most notorious extreme-left organization were the Red Brigades (Brigate Rosse), an organization established by students. Mario Moretti was one of the founders of the Red Brigade and was arrested in 1981.

(Mosca & Rossanda, 1994) The Red Brigade did not believe the protesters could reach a goal by themselves and were of the opinion that the protesters were losing the battle. They were losing their patience as the revolution was no nearer. The red terrorists were of the opinion that everything was not going as fast as it should regarding transformation in the politics. Therefore they chose the violent way with violent action. A big trigger in this was the political decision of the Communist PCI- leader Enrico Berlinguer, to start an alliance with the Christian Democrats. This alliance is named the 'historic compromise'. The idea behind the compromise was to be able to push forward more economic reforms while at the same time legitimizing the Communist Party in the eyes of the Western world as a non-revolutionary party. According to Ginsborg the historic compromise was a crucial mistake what led to more violent attacks.

The PCI tried to create a feeling so that the citizens would consider them a rather responsible party. They did not talk about the problems among youth or other crucial topics whatsoever. (Ginsborg, 1990) The PCI became a most passionate protector of the traditional law and order measures. In this way, the Communists wanted to prevent the spread of violence, however their strategies turned out to be creating a more rich territory for the terrorists.

(Ginsborg, 2001) The attack of 1969 in Milan started the Strategy of the Tension and responsible for this action were right extremists. They wanted to create preconditions for an authoritarian regime by letting the people believe that the attacks were part of a Communist revolution. The right extremists were supported by the army and secret services.

The growth of terrorism, both red and black groups, in Italy in the 1970's was immense. The number of aggression of the left wing terrorism was shockingly high. The Red Brigades most notorious action was the kidnapping of Christian Democrat leader Aldo Moro in 1978. After several months Moro was found murdered in a car. From the black terrorist groups the most notorious one is the massacre on the central station of Bologna where 80 people were killed.

At the end of the 80's the protests stopped and the plumb years were past tense. The political system found a way to survive throughout these years. However, politics seemed more difficult to proceed in the same way it did for the last couple of decades.

1.5 The fall of the First Republic

The 80's in Italy were characterized by a worsened and blocked political system. The Christian Democrats were already in power for 40 years and it was not likely that this would change soon. The cause for this unusual case in a western democracy is to be found in combination of the electoral system, the structure of the political system as well as the voting behaviour of the Italian population.

(Ginsborg 2001) The electoral system of proportional representation was not favourable, because this system provided a range of votes in the parliament, but it could not offer governments with clear majorities or mandates.

In the 1980s, a high point was reached when government coalitions consisting of five parties, known as the 'Pentapartito' were formed. (Gilbert & Nilson, 2007) This term was used to describe the five-party coalition of the Christian Democrats, the Italian Socialist Party, the Italian Republican Party, the Italian Social Democratic Party, and the Italian Liberal Party that governed Italy between June 1981 and April 1991. In these ten years there were nine different governments. If one coalition partner felt dissatisfied, over their position or a policy, it could request a clarification. Afterwards often followed a government crises.

The political system as stated earlier was blocked and degenerated. This in combination with more than one corruption scandal and the rise of mafia crimes was a wake-up call for political reform. The mafia committed some shocking killings on high profile persons. Such as the murder on general Alberto Dalla Chiesa, who was especially known for his actions against terrorism in the 70's. He was shot by the mafia group Cosa Nostra after being appointed to tackle such violence.

(Ginsborg, 2001) In the North of Italy the demand for reforms expressed itself through the emergence of the new neo-localist party Lega Nord (Northern League). Leader of this party was Umberto Bossi who desired independence of North Italy. They believed that the wealthier north paid for the lazy and parasite South. Therefore their most important slogan was 'Rome, the big thief'. The Lega Nord believed that the prosperity of the North disappeared into the pockets of the corrupt South. (Van Osta, 2008) They called for rebellion and resistance against the Roman politicians and parties, their inefficient bureaucracy and the increasingly reckless taxes. Their promises were among others, freedom by means of autonomy for the North and liberalisation of the centralized suppression and corruption. They wanted the centralized politics to disappear and governments to be based local.

1. 5.1 Political commotion

(Van Osta, 2008) Besides the protests of the Northern League there were more Italians who refused to accept the same pattern of the Italian politics that did not change since 1946. They believed the domination of the Christian Democrats and the existing political parties apathetic. A new young Christian Democrat Mario Segni recognized the limitations of the parliament and questioned the possibilities for renewal as a result of the blocked political system in Italy. He strived for a more efficient government and his goal was to correct the political system from the bottom. He suggested a referendum where changes in the electoral law were proposed. The Christian Democrats as well as the Socialists and the president of the republic were against the idea of this referendum. Despite the hostility towards the referendum the date was set on June 9, 1991.

(Ginsborg, 2001) The outcome of the referendum turned out to be a big surprise when 95 percent voted in favour for ending of the multi-preference votes.

62 percent of the voting population came out that Sunday June 9, 1991 to vote. Within a few months a new electoral law was established. Christian Democrat Mario Segni was the first able to break the political system. Despite his efforts the entire political system in Italy collapsed only a couple months after the new electoral law when the corruption scandals came to light.

1.6.1 Corruption

As a result of the proportional electoral system the Christian Democrats always had to govern with many other parties. (Van Osta, 2008) The Italians had developed a sort compromise democracy, where all parties could have a place. However the negative effect was that parties gained gather too much power, so that they actually became a state within the state. The term for this phenomenon is *partitocrazia*. The power what these parties had was especially to be felt by officials. A comprehensive system of corruption and clientelism was extensive amongst the pentapartito governments already in the 1980's. Clientelism was an often recurring branch of corruption. Politicians divided the whole society with each other and spread government money in exchange for political power. (Ginsborg, 2001)

In the late 80's and early 90's corruption scandals were daily news. It seemed that these scandals were just a little glance. In 1992 the entire corruption system and how it worked was revealed through the *tangentopoli* scandal. (Ginsborg, 2001) Antonio di Pietro, who was a young magistrate gave order to arrest Solicalist politician Mario Chiesa. This was the beginning of an entire web of corruption in Milan. It did not just stay within Milan, politicians and entrepreneurs were arrested in a short time. Corruption and clientelism was an obvious problem in Italian politics for many years that was only revealed in the beginning of the 1990's. (Van Osta, 2008) The magistrates gathered evidence of recent periods during their investigations. However the collusion between politicians, businessmen and civil servants had a longer history in Italy.

1.6.2 Tangentopoli – The 'Clean Hands' Campaign

Tangentopoli began on 17 February 1992 when judge Antonio Di Pietro had Mario Chiesa, a member of the Italian Socialist Party, arrested for accepting a bribe from a Milan cleaning firm.

The PSI distanced themselves from Chiesa. Upset over this treatment by his former colleagues, Chiesa began to give information about corruption implicating his colleagues. This was the start of the Clean Hands campaign. During April 1992, many industrial figures and politicians, especially from the majority parties but also from the opposition, were arrested on charges of corruption. While the investigations started in Milan, they quickly spread from town to town, as more and more politicians confessed. Fundamental to this exponential expansion was the general attitude of the main politicians

to drop support for minor politicians who got caught; this made many of them feel betrayed, and they often implicated many other politicians, who in turn would implicate even more.

In the local December elections, the Christian Democrats lost half of their votes. The day after that, Bettino Craxi, leader of the Italian Socialist Party, was officially accused of corruption. After many other politicians were accused and jailed, Craxi eventually resigned. It was clear that scandal had a strong hold on politics, the judicial investigations of the magistrates tormented the whole political class and all Government parties, as the ex-Communist party, were under attack. In view of the circumstances, an outsider, the socialist Giuliano Amato, was appointed as the new Prime Minister. In the short period that he served his country, seven of his ministers were forced to resign. In December 1992, Bettino Craxi, the leader of the Socialist Party and former Prime Minister, was charged with several complaints. He had to resign as party leader in 1993 and when he lost his parliamentary immunity he fled to Tunisia, where he lived until he died. In the summer of 1993, the number of requests for the abolition of parliamentary inviolability was 395 for members of the parliament and senators. This was a third of all parliamentarians (Ginsborg, 2001 & Van Osta, 2008).

Due to their Fascist past, the Founding Fathers of the Italian Republic strove to create an anti-authoritarian and pluralist Italian democracy. Although this idealistic view sounded good, in practice it turned out to be one of the causes of weak and ineffectual government. The electoral system of proportional representation ensured a plurality of voices in Parliament, but it did not provide governments with clear majorities and mandates. As a result the Christian Democrats governed the country for almost half a century in unstable coalitions with several smaller parties, causing a sort of consensus democracy where all parties had a place. A negative side effect was the rise of 'partitocrazia'.

Throughout the years, an extensively corrupt system of clientelism emerged, where the parties distributed Government money in exchange for political power, charging heavily in reverse for their favours. In the aftermath of the 1992 elections and the Clean Hands campaign being in full swing, the two principal ruling parties, the Christian Democrats and the Socialist Party, disappeared, as well as their minor allies, the Liberals, Social Democrats and Republicans. Now that those parties were swept away, a great void had been created in the centre of Italian politics. The rise of the Northern League, the referendum of 1991, the clean hands campaign, all these were signals of fractures in Italy's political system at the beginning of the 1990s. It was into that space that Silvio Berlusconi stepped.

1.7 Sub-conclusion

'What are the key elements of the political system in Italy after the Second World War?'

The electoral system laid the foundation for an unstable political system with no clear majorities or mandates. The Christian Democrats dominated the political system in Italy for 50 years. Despite the constant presence of the Christian Democrats in the government the political system was very unstable with more than 50 governments in 44 years (1948 – 1992). Due to their Fascist past, the Founding Fathers of the Italian Republic strove to create an anti-authoritarian and pluralist Italian democracy. Although this idealistic view sounded good, in practice it turned out to be one of the causes of weak and ineffectual government, as the research in this chapter has shown. The electoral system of proportional representation ensured a plurality of voices in Parliament, but it did not provide governments with clear majorities and mandates. As a result the Christian Democrats governed the country for almost half a century in unstable coalitions with several smaller parties, causing a sort of consensus democracy where all parties had a place.

The economic miracle had a deep impact on Italian society. Although the Christian Democrats were the party of modernization and the ‘economic miracle’, they ignored the social consequences from the economic growth, such as huge migration to the cities. This led to the Plumb years in the 70’s and 80’s, characterized by protests, democratic disorder and terrorism. As a result of the disfunctioning political system and social tensions, new political parties were formed. A negative side effect was the rise of ‘partitocrazia’. Throughout the years, an extensively corrupt system of clientelism emerged, where the parties distributed government-money in exchange for political power, charging heavily in reverse for their favours.

What series of events led to the end of the ‘First Republic’? How did the events in Italy’s post-war politics from 1946 to 1993 contribute to the establishment of Forza Italy in 1993?

In the aftermath of the 1992 elections and the Clean Hands campaign being in full swing, the two principal ruling parties, the Christian Democrats and the Socialist Party, disappeared, as well as their minor allies, the Liberals, Social Democrats and Republicans. Now that those parties were swept away, a great void had been created in the centre of Italian politics. The rise of the Northern League, the referendum of 1991, the clean hands campaign, all these were signals of fractures in Italy’s political system at the beginning of the 1990s. It was into that space that Silvio Berlusconi stepped. The void that was created in Italian politics was what Berlusconi seek in order to find that gap in which he could stand. He presented himself as a man who stood for modernization and who was willing to change the Italian system. He said what the population wanted to hear. Therefore it can be said that this is an example of populism.

2. Forza Italia and its leader Silvio Berlusconi

Forza Italia was formed in 1993 by Silvio Berlusconi, a successful businessman and owner of three of the main private television stations in Italy. He named his political party 'Forza Italia' (go for it, Italy). This derives from the chanting of the fans of Italy's national football team. On January 26, 1994 Berlusconi broadcasted a video message on his own TV-channel RAI5. He announced to enter politics with his party Forza Italia. His love for Italy, he said, was his biggest motivation to join politics. In this chapter I have described how Forza Italia functioned in Italy, as well as, in the European Union; how Berlusconi managed to stay in control throughout these years and his role in the Council of Europe.

2.1 Functioning of Forza Italia

Forza Italia's aim was to attract moderate voters who were disoriented, political orphans and who risked being unrepresented (as Berlusconi described them). According to the statutes of the party (Forza Italia, 1997), Forza Italia defines itself as a political movement and an association of citizens who feel they belong 'to the traditions of liberal democracy, liberal catholicism, lay traditions, and the tradition of European reformism'. Forza Italia combines an ambition to introduce more market mechanisms, privatize public property, make the labour market more flexible and decrease taxes (these elements are all typical liberal, right-wing politics) with a conservative value-based policy in terms of culture and families. This means that Forza Italia has no clear ideological identity; it is neither Christian democratic, nor clearly liberalist (Stjerno, 2009, p. 229).

Authors Ruzzo and Fella reflect in their book on the organizing of Forza Italia. In their book they refer to author Poli, who argued in 2001 that Forza Italia appeared 'now to have re-entered into the more conventional model of party organisation' (Poli, 2001, p. 41). Similarly, Pasquino has referred to Poli's analysis in arguing that Forza Italia is no longer an anomaly within the Italian party system, but instead has become an organized party, entrenched throughout Italy, relying on hundreds of thousand members and several thousand ambitious office-holders (Pasquino, 2003b). Nevertheless, Paolucci argues that Forza Italia still has not been institutionalized: 'At the central level the organization, although it formally exists, is irrelevant in decision-making powers, which still rest entirely with the party leader and his close circle. The central party bodies, therefore, cannot attract loyalties'. Forza Italia remains a patrimonial party in which party recruitment is still personalized 'aimed at consolidating or confirming a personal relationship with Berlusconi specific party offices'. Those who are chosen are legitimized exclusively by this infusion of personal trust. Hence, their power is not linked to covering specific party offices, but to the oscillations of their personal relationship with Berlusconi. Loyalty converges on the leader, rather than on the organization. The perpetuation of the genetic characteristics of the party makes its status extremely precarious, potentially leading to its

disintegration, whenever the circumstances change' (Paolucci, 2007 p. 170) (Fella & Ruzza, 2009, p. 125-126).

Paolucci outlined three key characteristics of Forza Italia: patrimonial organization, the business-firm character and charismatic leadership (Paolucci 2006, p. 166). As a patrimonial organization Forza Italia was 'owned, controlled and directed by its founder and leader', Silvio Berlusconi. The business-firm character involved 'the transfer of people, but also structures, ideology, styles and procedures from Berlusconi's firms into the party', while the charismatic leadership of Berlusconi 'played an important legitimizing function, by justifying patrimonialism internally and the business model externally, thereby guaranteeing the loyalty of the activists and the support of the voters'. The charismatic leadership of Berlusconi was particularly important given the importance of the media to modern political campaigning. His TV skills and ownership of the main private TV networks in Italy were crucial here. The new party was tailored around Berlusconi's personality and interests and became his personal instrument. Thus, Berlusconi personally oversaw the party's organizational design, staffed it with people from his business and dominated media images of the party as its sole figurehead. (Paolucci 2006, p. 166-167) (Fella & Ruzza 2009, p.122)

2.2 Forza Italia in government, 1994 - 2006

A few months after its creation, Forza Italia came to national power after the 1994 elections, as the head of a political coalition called Pole of Freedoms/Pole of Good Government. This coalition was composed of the parties Lega Nord, National Alliance, Christian Democratic Centre and Union of the Centre. Modernization and a new Italian miracle were his key aspects in the video message (Scaruffi, n.d. p. 47). Berlusconi showed he knew what the Italian people wanted to see and hear, Modernization and a new Italian miracle were his key aspects in the video message (Daarray, 2005). His intelligence and understanding of media influence and his reference to his father who taught him entrepreneurship were what triggered the Italian patriarchal population. (J.K. White & P. Davies, 1999)

After his declaration on national television Berlusconi succeeded in putting together a coalition. Many were surprised by this remarkable collaboration between Umberto Bossi of the Lega Nord and leader of the National Alliance, Gianfranco Fini; it was known that these two did not like each other. The differences between both parties was enormous with the biggest contradiction the pro-centralized political agenda of the National Alliance against the localized, potentially separatist Northern League. Berlusconi's aim for the elections was to win many votes even though this alliance was not likely to last long in the future (Van Osta, 2008).

The government had a short life and fell in December, when Lega Nord left the coalition, after disagreements over pension reform and the first preliminary notice of an investigation into Berlusconi, passed by Milan prosecutors. Silvio Berlusconi, Forza Italia's leader, was replaced as prime minister

by Lamberto Dini, an independent politician who had been the administration's treasury minister. No members of Forza Italia joined the new government and the party leader was relegated to opposition.

Forza Italia regained power in the 2001 elections (29.4% along with Giorgio La Malfa's tiny Italian Republican Party), in a new coalition called House of Freedoms and composed mainly of the National Alliance, Lega Nord, Christian Democratic Centre and United Christian Democrats. Berlusconi won the 2001 general election essentially for the negative reason that Italians were fed up with the ruling of the Olive Tree coalition, whose five years in office had been punctuated by four governments and three prime ministers. The Olive Tree coalition was an appellation used for several successive centre-left political and electoral alliances of Italian political parties. The historical leader and ideologue of these coalitions was Romano Prodi, a Christian Democrat. Prodi resigned in 1998 after losing his parliamentary majority by just one vote (Jansen & van Hecke, 2011).

In June 2001, after the huge success in the May elections, Silvio Berlusconi returned as head of the Italian government, the longest-serving cabinet in the history of the Italian republic (Ginsborg, 2004). Again all key ministerial posts were given to Forza Italia members. Gianfranco Fini, National Alliance's leader, was appointed vice-president of the government and Minister of Foreign Affairs from 2004 to 2006. While Roberto Castelli, senior figure of Lega Nord was Minister of Justice from 2001 to 2006.

The government's popularity kept declining steadily year after year. Regional elections in April 2005 were a serious disappointment for the party, which however remained strong in the northern regions, such as Lombardy and Veneto, and some places in the South, where Sicily is a stronghold. After this disappointing electoral performance the cabinet was reshuffled, upon the insistence of the Union of Christian and Centre Democrats's leaders, and Berlusconi formed his third cabinet

2.3 Berlusconi's reforms

In 2001 Berlusconi had promised much in the way of reforms to the economy. Moreover, Berlusconi used media and communications tools, which he understood better than most, to deliver special messages in the build-up to the elections in 2001. His 127 page personal statement on his vision for Italy, entitled 'Una Storia Italiana', was an extravagant demonstration of his personal and direct approach (Ginsborg, 2004 p. 94).

During these five years in office, Berlusconi's government passed a series of reforms: a pension system reform, a labour market reform, a judiciary reform and a constitutional reform – the latter rejected by a referendum in June 2006; In November 2005, Berlusconi's reforms were approved by both chambers of the Italian Parliament by absolute majorities, rather than by two-thirds of the vote. As a consequence, according to Article 138 of the Constitution, the way was open for a referendum. The popular consultation took place on June 25-26, 2006. 61,7% of the voters rejected it, in spite of

misleading information from both the state-owned and private media, and government propaganda that described the reform as a unique occasion to modernize and simplify Italian institutions. 25 million people voted in the referendum, 53,7% of the electorate. Opposition was especially high in the South, demonstrating that federalism was perceived as the main core of the reform.

There were a number of major changes recommended by Berlusconi's government. Firstly, the Parliament should have inquiry over regional laws that were considered to conflict with the national interest. Secondly, there was the introduction of the 'Federal Senate', with the consequent elimination of symmetric bicameralism. Thirdly, there was the possibility of giving the regions legislative power on crucial areas such as health, education and security. Fourthly, there was to be a strengthening of the Prime Minister's role, with relevant changes to the parliamentary system. Fifthly, the role of the President of the Republic was modified. Finally, a revision was to be made to the composition of the Constitutional Court (Wolff, 2012 p.2).

However, it was rejected by a referendum in June 2006. In November 2005, Berlusconi's reforms were approved by both chambers of the Italian Parliament by absolute majorities, rather than by two-thirds of the vote. As a consequence, according to Article 138 of the Constitution, the way was open for a referendum. The popular consultation took place on June 25-26, 2006. 61,7% of the voters rejected it. 25 million people voted in the referendum, 53,7% of the electorate. Opposition was especially high in the South, demonstrating that federalism was perceived as the main core of the reform (Wolff, 2012 p. 5) (Italian Constitution, Article 138, p. 38).

The economy inherited by the Berlusconi government in 2001 was one of contrast and mixed performance. It was nonetheless a marked improvement on the economic performance of the early 1990s (Pasquino, 2001a, p. 373). The centre-left economic programme was dominated by two key drivers: bringing the economy out of the recession of the early to mid-1990s and complying with the Maastricht Criteria for entry into the Eurozone. Preparation for Eurozone entry alone brought significant economic changes and improvements. Above all, the centre-left government introduced major privatizations and budget cuts and focused on revenue collection reforms. In the period 1993–2000 Italy had privatized more of its state enterprises than any other country in the world (Mascitelli & Zucchi 2007, p.132).

Berlusconi inherited a healthier but not necessarily healthy Italian economy. Along with the difficulties relating to expenditure came a number of other under-performing segments of the economy. Levels of unemployment were higher than in comparable European states, Italy's export performance was sagging, the competitiveness of the Italian economy was rapidly declining and productivity and future investment in R&D were at all-time lows. All eyes were now focused on whether the new Berlusconi administration could tackle these economic weaknesses and continue the

economic recovery that the centre-left had introduced. However, economic recovery was not helped by the political and judicial difficulties that Berlusconi and his government faced. Berlusconi was not only Italy's Prime Minister, but also the country's richest man, one whose 'conflict of interest' did not preclude him from government nor inhibit his proposed extraordinary legislation to protect his assets, himself and close friends. All of which got in the way of real economic reform (Mascitelli & Zucchi 2007, p.134).

2.4 Forza Italia and Europe

Forza Italia joined the European People's Party in the European Parliament in the late 1999. The European People's Party (EPP) is a European centre-right political party, founded in 1976, whose roots run deep in the history and civilisation of the European continent and which has pioneered the European project from its inception. Tracing back its roots to Europe's Founding Fathers, Robert Schuman, Alcide Gasperi and Konrad Adenauer, the EPP is committed to a strong Europe based on a federal model that relies on the principle of subsidiarity. The widely respected Dutch party CDA and German CDU/CSU are member of the EPP as well.

At a later stage, the EPP increased its membership to include conservative parties and parties of other centre-right political perspectives. This is consistent with Berlusconi's domestic political strategy of moving Forza Italia to occupy the centre-right political space, formerly the domain of the Christian Democrats (M. Gilbert & G. Pasquino, 2001). In response to this challenge, one of the leading parties descended from the DC, the left-wing PPI, tried for many years to block Forza Italia's membership of the EPP. The parties opposed to Berlusconi's entry into the EPP argued that Forza Italia would shift the party group to the right, giving it a more conservative identity. However, Helmut Kohl and the Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar supported Forza Italia and in December 1999 it was granted full membership. By entering the EPP, Berlusconi was able to give Forza Italia additional credibility as a respectable centre-right party.

Berlusconi was president of the Council of Europe from July until December 2003. His status as president of the Council could have helped to improve his image as a grand politician. However, Berlusconi was scrutinized by the European parliament for the way he dealt with the accusations of corruptions in his own country. The way he responded to the questions from parliament, underlined the sense that Berlusconi thought he was above the law.

On July 2, 2003 Berlusconi held a speech for the European Parliament. Subsequently, the Deputies questioned him and as a result Martin Schulz, the Vice President of the German Social Democrats in the Parliament, asked him to explain why Italy was blocking the idea of an European arrest warrant for crimes such as corruption. Also he asked why it had introduced the new law on rogatories and why the request of the Spanish magistrate, Garzón, to remove Berlusconi and Dell'Ultri's European Parliamentary immunity had not reached the Assembly. Although this may have seemed provocative,

it were legitimate questions. As a reply Berlusconi answered that he knew a producer in Italy who was making a film about the Nazi concentration camps: (Ginsborg, 2005, p. 152)

“I shall recommend you, Signor Schulz, for the role of camp guard.”

This resulted in an uproar in the international media, including its liberal and conservative sections. For example, according to an article of the British online newspaper BBC “Many Germans regard Berlusconi’s comments as insensitive and crass. Young people in Germany who have had to come to terms with their country’s Nazi past are equally astounded that a senior statesman could have put his foot in his mouth.” (BBC, 2003 ‘Germany sickened by Berlusconi’)

The Chancellor of Germany, Schroeder, called Berlusconi’s remarks unacceptable. Responding, Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, said that the comments Schulz made prior to Berlusconi’s statement, were as well unacceptable and an offence to the dignity of Berlusconi and all Italian. However, they did apologize and said they were sorry that Berlusconi’s response was interpreted differently by some. European opinion polls revealed the damage done. To the question of which European premier could be trusted other than their own German’s replied with only 2 percent for Berlusconi. The French replied with 11 percent for Berlusconi and finally, the British responded with only 7 percent for Berlusconi. What is remarkable is that even though such widespread discrediting responds was not translated into action. The politicians in the European Union, even those politically opposed to Berlusconi, seemed content to turn a blind eye. The European Union appeared in that moment incapable of dealing with the undermining of democracy in one of its founder states. (Merlingen, 2001)

2.5 Sub-conclusion

How did Berlusconi establish his strategic position and what impact did the governing of Berlusconi and his party Forza Italia had in Italy, as well as, for Europe in the period 1993-2006?

Berlusconi used a new approach to reach out to the constituents by using simple and direct language during the election campaign of 1994. At that moment, the Italian population was dissatisfied with the politics in the country. Berlusconi at the time was a charismatic, wealthy man. In addition, he proclaimed what the dissatisfied population wanted to hear using simple language. This populist behaviour gave him the opportunity to step into politics. Noticeable, Berlusconi stepped into politics when the first results of the Clean Hands Campaign became visible. With the position he reached in politics, eventually as prime minister, he achieved immunity and could therefore not be charged for corruption. Another great advantage he had was owning three commercial television stations, which served him very well in his campaign while other political parties had difficulties getting any air time.

Forza Italia is member of the European People's party within the European Parliament. The widely respected Dutch party CDA and German CDU/CSU are member of that same European party. These parties are not often, or never, included in a discussion on corruption, or any other scandals. Forza Italia's assertion that it shares the same roots as the Christian democratic family and, for this reason, has a right to be part of the EPP, has long been an argument to gain domestic and international legitimacy after its creation in 1994, especially after its alliance with right-wing parties in the domestic scene (Conti, 2013 p. 87). Although he could have capitalized on his position as president of the Council of Europe in 2003, Berlusconi managed to create additional controversy surrounding his person by antagonizing the European Parliament.

3. Berlusconi and conflicts of interest

What makes Berlusconi particularly controversial as Prime Minister, are the several conflicts of interests. The several conflicts of interest is what made Silvio Berlusconi particularly controversial as Prime Minister. Berlusconi is a wealthy man owning many companies in several sectors. Accordingly, as Prime Minister he is in the position to take decisions that could benefit his private interest rather than the general interest. Berlusconi disregarded the allegation of unlawful conflict of interest. However, he was pressured from more than one side which made him promise to take measures and to dispose the control of Fininvest temporarily. He did not, however, keep this promise. In this chapter can be read how several conflicts of interest questioned Berlusconi's role as Prime Minister of Italy.

3.1 Conflict of interest in the media

Private and national interests were inseparably entangled and confused. (Ginsborg, 2001) An example of this conflict of interest was obvious when Berlusconi had a meeting with Rupert Murdoch, Australian-American media mogul, at the beginning of 2003. Also present was Fedele Confalonieri, President of Mediaset and oldest friend of Berlusconi. The meeting concerned the future of Italy's television network and Murdoch's plans to create Sky Italia, a pay TV channel. This meant that Italian commercial television would be now dominated by a Berlusconi-Murdoch duopoly.

Berlusconi's quasi-monopolistic control of media is most evident in TV, where 90 percent of TV broadcasts offer him support. This is achieved not only through generating favourable news while censoring inconvenient news, but also by creating the cultural background for legitimating the status quo. In Italy, TV has the clear effect as a tool of political information of influencing political decisions. In contrast to the influence of TV, wherefrom 69.3 percent receive their news during election times, only 25.4 percent of Italians derive their political information from reading a newspaper (Ragnedda & Muschert, 2010 p.4).

Perhaps more interestingly, TV is the most important source of information for Italians, in deciding how they will vote (Censis, 2009). For certain groups this tendency is more pronounced, as TV is the primary source of information for 76 percent of those with low levels of education, for 74.1 percent of housewives, 78.7 percent of pensioners, and for 81.8 percent of the elderly (Censis, 2009). 27 percent of Italian citizens report that they know how they would vote 5 weeks prior to the an election. The remaining 73 percent decided at election time. A decision that may be strongly influenced by TV viewing which is strongly controlled by Berlusconi (Magedda & Muschert, 2010 p. 4) (Censis, 2009).

TV has a strong influence on the voting behaviours of Italian citizens, and control of TV in Italy is an important tool for obtaining and maintaining political power. Berlusconi, with his private media

empire and his political influence on public TV, easily influenced the agenda in political campaigns, manipulating public opinion. In fact, those who consumed more TV were also more likely to vote for Berlusconi; especially those who watch more than four hours of TV per day (Demos & Pi, 2009)

3.2 Controversial laws

The judicial system was another conflict Berlusconi had to deal with more than once. The fear he had before he entered politics for being investigated for corruption was actually one of his reasons to become a politician. It was his personal fight to stay out of the hands of the judges as he had been charged with several accusations. He attacked the judicial system verbally on a regular basis with one of his most infamous statements saying: *'Judges and magistrates are the cancer of the democracy'*, 2011. He made this statement because he had to appear in court (Fabbrini & Della Sala, 2004 p. 12) (Ginsborg, 2004 p. 178 – 180)

A large number of Italians could proceed with their unlawful acts. This could happen because Berlusconi introduced several laws that allowed this. One of these laws is on the term of limitation of many crimes, including corruption and a law that made prosecution of accounting fraud almost impossible.

Another law made it possible to transfer black money from abroad to Italy by paying a small payment. In December 2001 Italy tried to block the introduction of an European warrant for crimes such as fraud, corruption and money laundering. (The Economist, your other trials, 2003) Also the law into legitimate suspicion was reintroduced, meaning that any citizen on trial could claim that there existed the legitimate suspicion for the court being not neutral. They could also ask to transfer his or her trial elsewhere. It was also due to legitimate suspicion that the constitutional court dismissed Berlusconi's case. Finally, three of Berlusconi's trial accusations were dropped by the judiciary. In June 2003 another new law went into effect; legal immunity for the duration of their tenure to those holding the five highest offices of the Italian state. The Constitutional Court ruled against this law in October 2009 (Hooper, 2011).

3.3 Aftermath for Italian politics

During the 1990s, the Italian Parliament started to deal with the issue of conflict of interest, although the debate on how to resolve Berlusconi's conflict continued for nearly a decade without producing any significant results. In 1994 the center-left opposition, proposed a bill that underlined the incompatibility of public offices with private ownership, requiring the adoption of a blind trust in relation to liquid assets. In response, the center-right advanced an alternative project, elaborated by three experts, based on the principle of abstention: in the case of material assets, a public officer must abstain from intervening in the management of his own company; in the case of liquid assets, a blind trust is established. In 1995, the opposition's blind trust bill and three sages bill were fused into a

single bill that recognized the incompatibility clause of the 1957 law and prescribed the sale of liquid assets were possible. However, the sudden call for new elections at the end of 1995 prohibited final approval of this bill. A new bill, elaborated by the center-left majority, emerged with the parliamentary election of 1996, based on the principle of incompatibility. However the bill was shelved once the dialogue on constitutional reform between the majority and the center-right opposition collapsed (Throst & Gash, 2007, p. 203).

3.5 Italy compared to The Netherlands

To compare the Italian to the Dutch system on conflicts of interest, I looked at a formal letter the former Dutch Prime Minister, Balkenende sent to the Dutch House of Parliament in 2002 before the formation of a new cabinet (Balkenende 2002). In the letter it was stated that a candidate minister or state secretary must discard all other positions and extracurricular activities. This also regards volunteer positions in clubs or associations, part-time professorships, editorial functions and memberships of committees of recommendation. Exceptions are possible only with written permission of the Prime Minister. Within this letter it stated is in Appendix A, that the following aspects are named as financial and business interests that could cause a risk of (apparent) conflict of interest:

- Shares or risk participations / investments in individual listed and non-listed companies, as far as the cumulative value thereof at the time of acceptance of the position is higher than € 25,000;
- Notwithstanding the general rule under A.5 *) exists for the Ministers of Finance in respect of shares in public funds indeed the risk of (apparent) conflict of interest and are therefore not permitted for them; in view of the special powers of the ministers for the financial markets;
- Movable and immovable property which are operated, where the person concerned has influence on the management and operation, and as far as the cumulative net income on an annual basis exceeds € 3,500 commercial;
- Options on shares during the term of office may be exercised;
- Option to return or a "zero hours contract" with an employer;
- Financial and business interests of a partner if there is a marriage in community of property.

*) According to the general rule under A.5 there in shares in public funds no (apparent) conflict of interest.

At a cabinet formation the formatter discusses these matters with all the candidate ministers and –state secretaries. There are several acceptable solutions to avoid conflicts of interest. For example, a Minister's private company could transfer the management to an independent foundation.

To reflect this situation to the Italian matter in the years of Berlusconi; Being a Prime Minister and having the most important Italian commercial channels on television is a conflict of interest that could

not happen in The Netherlands, because the law does not allow candidate ministers or state secretaries to have any other position as stated above.

3.4 Sub-conclusion

What was the media conflict of interest Berlusconi was involved in and what were the consequences for Italian politics?

As a result of Berlusconi's conflicts of interest as stated above, it can be concluded Berlusconi is a continuation of the old political system. The state of Italian politics has even weakened. Possessing a large business emporium and being the Prime-Minister simultaneously does not provide a guarantee that he will put the interests of the Italian State first, over his business interest. In other areas, Berlusconi has shown that his personal interests always seem to receive precedence. His governance was a government that seems to make a stand only for its own interest. They created laws that seem to suit them very well, especially when it comes to keeping himself out of the hands of justice. For example, he did not change the law on the term of limitation of many crimes because he thought this would serve the best interest of the country. The actual reason was that, in this way, he could be cleared of some charges that he was accused off. A Prime Minister who openly tries to undermine the rule of law apparently has little respect for the laws in his own country.

After analysing the information that is available on the possible consequences for Italian politics, one must agree with authors Throst & Gash as state in their book: 'Berlusconi's leadership characterized an unusual and dangerous case of conflict of interest, on with serious repercussions for Italian democracy. The collapse of the traditional party system in Italy not only opened the way to economic interests seeking control over government decisions, but also offered unexpected opportunities for the rise of new "political" actors, namely media organizations. Given the role played by media in contemporary democracies, this new actor had easily become the most influential one' (Throst & Gash, 2008, p. 202).

As Passigli stated in his paper the politics and legislation of conflict of interest in Italy "the ways in which political consensus is formed are one of the crucial aspects to be considered when judging the democratic character of any system." It is no coincidence that the conflict of interest issue is particularly urgent when, as in Italy's case, it involves the power that control over the mass media gives on the formation of political consensus. The control of the media, through their influence on the formation of political consensus, becomes political power, and this in turn strengthens one's economic and media power, in a circle that is the exact opposite of the virtuous circle of democracy, which requires an adequate degree of separation between different forms of power, and particularly between economic power and political power (Passigli, p. 3).

Conclusion

This dissertation has looked at how the post-war political system contributed to the rise of Silvio Berlusconi. The answer to these questions start at the drawing up of the Constitution in 1948. Due to their Fascist past, the Founding Fathers of the Italian Republic strove to create an anti-authoritarian and pluralist Italian democracy. Although this idealistic view sounded good, in practice it turned out to be one of the causes of weak and ineffectual government. The electoral system laid the foundation for an unstable political system with no clear majorities or mandates. The Christian Democrats dominated the political system in Italy for almost 50 years. Despite the constant presence of the Christian Democrats in the government the political system was very unstable with more than 50 governments in 44 years (1948 – 1992).

The ‘economic miracle’ had a deep impact on Italian society. Although the Christian Democrats were the party of modernization and the ‘economic miracle’, they ignored the social consequences from the economic growth, such as huge migration to the cities. This led to the Plumb years in the 70’s and 80’s, characterized by protests, democratic disorder and terrorism. As a result of the disfunctioning political system and social tensions, new political parties were formed. A negative side effect was the rise of ‘partitocrazia’. Throughout the years, an extensively corrupt system of clientelism emerged, where the parties distributed government-money in exchange for political power, charging heavily in reverse for their favours.

In the aftermath of the 1992 elections and the Clean Hands campaign being in full swing, the two principal ruling parties, the Christian Democrats and the Socialist Party, disappeared, as well as their minor allies, the Liberals, Social Democrats and Republicans. Now that those parties were swept away, a great void had been created in the centre of Italian politics. The rise of the Northern League, the referendum of 1991 and the clean hands campaign, were all signals of fractures in Italy’s political system at the beginning of the 1990s. It was into that space that Silvio Berlusconi stepped with Forza Italia. He presented himself as a man who stood for modernization and who was willing to change the Italian system. He said what the population wanted to hear. Therefore it can be said that this is an example of populism.

Berlusconi used a new political approach by using simple and direct language during the election campaign of 1994. The Italian population was dissatisfied at that moment with the politics in the country. Berlusconi at the time was a charismatic, wealthy man. This populist behaviour gave him the opportunity to successfully step into politics. Noticeable, Berlusconi stepped into politics when the Clean Hands Campaign just started to yield results. Through his political position, he created immunity and could therefore not be charged for corruption. Berlusconi’s three commercial television

stations did him well in his campaign while other political parties had difficulties getting any air time.

Berlusconi was actually a continuation of the old political system. The state of Italian politics had even weakened. Possessing a large business-media emporium and being the Prime-Minister simultaneously does not provide a guarantee that he will put the interests of the Italian State first, over his business interest. In other areas, Berlusconi has shown that his personal interests always seem to receive precedence. His governance was a government that seems to make a stand only for its own interest. They created laws that seem to suit them very well. For example, Berlusconi did not change the law on the term of limitation of many crimes. Which resulted in the fact that he could be cleared of some charges that he was accused off. A Prime Minister who openly tries to undermine the rule of law apparently has little respect for the laws in his own country.

Berlusconi's leadership characterized an unusual and dangerous case of conflict of interest, with serious repercussions for Italian democracy. The collapse of the traditional party system in Italy not only opened the way to economic interests seeking control over government decisions, but also offered unexpected opportunities for the rise of new "political" actors, namely media organizations. Given the role played by media in contemporary democracies, this new actor had easily become the most influential one.

As Passigli stated in his paper the politics and legislation of conflict of interest in Italy "the ways in which political consensus is formed are one of the crucial aspects to be considered when judging the democratic character of any system." It is no coincidence that the conflict of interest issue is particularly urgent when, as in Italy's case, it involves the power that control over the mass media gives on the formation of political consensus. The control of the media, through their influence on the formation of political consensus, becomes political power, and this in turn strengthens one's economic and media power, in a circle that is the exact opposite of the virtuous circle of democracy, which requires an adequate degree of separation between different forms of power, and particularly between economic power and political power (Passigli, p. 3). Berlusconi was Prime Minister and has the most important Italian commercial channels on television. These two functions at the same time is a conflict of interest that could not happen in The Netherlands, because the law does not allow candidate ministers or state secretaries to have any other position as stated above.

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