Role and value of regional differentiation in the EU through the Italian experience: coming together or moving apart?


ABSTRACT

The paper will join the debate of the conference on “Coming Together or Moving Apart?” by examining the attitude of EU toward regional differentiation and sub-national entities and the recent requests for more autonomy from sub-national entities. The goal is to understand the role and value of regional differentiation in the European Union and its impact on European integration process.

The area explored considers as “regional” sub-national entities with legislative powers which could include a variety of experiences, such as federal state (Germany), regional state (Italy/Spain) or unity state (UK). For the analysis, I will focus mainly on the Italian experience, in historical and current perspective, where a new phase of asymmetrical regionalism has started in the last year.

1. Introduction: the role and value of regional differentiation in theory and in practice.

An impressive amount of studies have demonstrated and highlighted the role and value of regional differentiation in economic, political and legal perspectives. For the purpose of this analysis, I will recall three famous studies which deal with three different aspects of the role and value of differentiations in decentralized system and I will use them as a starting point and benchmark for looking at the EU and Italian current contexts.
Firstly I am recalling what Robert Dahl said about federal democracy, as “a system in which some matters are exclusively within the competence of certain local units—cantons, states, provinces—and are constitutionally beyond the scope of the authority of the national government; and when certain other matters are constitutionally outside the scope of the authority of the smaller units”.¹

Secondly, I am quoting what Justice Louis D. Brandeis wrote in 1932 in a famous dissenting opinion: “It is one of the happy incidents of the federal system that a single courageous State may, if its citizens choose, serve as a laboratory; and try novel social and economic experiments without risk to the rest of the country.”²

Lastly, in a study of 1979 Daniel Elazar dealt the question of unity and diversity in decentralized system (³): “One of the characteristics of federalism is its aspiration and purpose simultaneously to generate and maintain both unity and diversity. (…) Federalizing involves both the creation and maintenance of unity and the diffusion of power in the name of diversity. (…)When discussing federalism, it is a mistake to present unity and diversity as opposites. Unity should be contrasted with disunity and diversity with homogeneity, emphasizing the political dimensions and implications of each ”; however “the question remains open as to what kinds or combinations of diversity are compatible with federal unity and which ones are not”.

These concepts are currently threatened in some part of Europe (i.e. Spain, UK, Italy) by various circumstances (request for more autonomy, globalization, economic crises, Brexit). Specifically, from the observation of the European experiences it comes to light, from one hand, that contemporary systems and societies face complex policy challenges (environments, migration, economic development) which require coordination, shared rules and intergovernmental collaborations instead of rigid separation of powers; from the other hand, several countries are struggling with the increasing gap on regional differentiation, and with the difficulties to combine unity and diversity.

Strong demand of autonomy comes from territories in Europe in the last years (in different ways: request for asymmetry and, sometimes, independence) and arises questions of the value of regional differentiation, of the role of regional entities, as well as of division of competences and intergovernmental relationships between levels of governments today in a context of globalization of the economy. The requests for more autonomy from some territories, and the political and constitutional consequences, could be used and interpreted as ‘moving apart from…’, or could represent the possibility to look at regional differentiation as a way for ‘coming together’. The choice will depends by national reactions but also by European answers.

2. The role and value of regional differentiation in EU.

³ Daniel J. Elazar, Federalism and Political Integration, Ramat Gan, Israel: Turtledove Publishing, 1979, 64, 67
The European institutional context is complex and varied, with of 41 national Parliament chambers, 74 regional legislative assemblies, 280 regions, and 80 000 local authorities, all differently involved in the application of European law and in the implementation of European Union policies.

The attitude of Europe toward regional differentiation has changed during years and could be described in four main periods:

1) The first period, which coincides with the beginning of the European integration process, has been described as a EU “regional blindness” where no relevance was accorded to sub-national entities.

2) The second period, described as “Europe of the Regions”, has been characterized by an evolution that signed the transition from a situation of "irrelevance" of regional entities to a consideration of them as essential levels for the realization of European objectives and of the whole European integration project. Many reasons are behind this evolution, linked to economic, geopolitical and institutional changes that occurred in international and European contexts. The progressive attention by the European and national levels towards sub-state entities during ‘90 were formalized in the European treaties (i.e. with the introduction of the principle of subsidiarity and the Committee of Regions) and encouraged processes of federalization or regionalization in several Member States (i.e. constitutional changes in Italy and devolution in UK).

During this period the concept of ‘multilevel governance’ spread out as one of the main characteristic of the EU system and was specifically addressed by the

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4 The metaphor "regional blindness" (Landesbindung) was used by H.P. Ipsen (Als Bundesstaat in der Gemeinschaft), in E. V. Caemmerer – H. J. Schlochauer – E. Steindorff, Probleme des europäischen Rechts. FS Hallstein, Frankfurt a. M. 1966, 248 ss.) and then variously taken up by international doctrine.


6 In fact, regional differentiation can be an obstacle to the full establishment of the internal market, since different economic conditions can hinder the uniformity required by freedom of movement. For this reasons, competition policy – which has always been a fundamental objective of the EU – provides for some specific exceptions, including regional state aid (art. 107, par. 2-3, art. 108, art. 349 TFUE); alongside regional policy of social and territorial economic cohesion became another fundamental objective of the treaties (Article 3 TEU, par. 3, art. 174-178 TFUE).

7 A “Union based on multilevel governance” was mentioned in the European Commission, “European governance - A white paper” (COM/2001/0428 final) and addressed firstly in literature by Marks, G. and Hooghe, L. (1996) "European Integration from the 1980s: State-Centric v. Multi-level Governance”. Journal of Common Market Studies, Vol.34, No. 3, 341-378, see also Hooghe, Liesbet and
Committee of the Regions in a “White Paper on multilevel governance” in 2009 and in a Charter for Multilevel Governance in Europe in 2014. Several modification in national legislations were held in this period to make effective the participation of subnational entities to European decision making process in the ascending and descending phase; the role of regional bodies in this area, in fact, is essentially determined by the States, which translates into a considerable differentiation of the discipline.

3) The economic crisis of 2008 had a huge impact on European multilevel governance system. The “Europe of Regions” has been "suspended" in the decade of the economic crisis, during which attention has been focused on the recovery of the European integration process and the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, then on the correspondence of States to austerity measures adopted for the economic crisis. This third period is characterized by a Europe at two dimensions (Europe and State) and a strong centralization process in many member States. As emerges from an OECD report (Multilevel Governance Reforms. Overview of OECD Country Experiences), on the one hand, austerity policies have blocked the ongoing reform processes and greatly reduced the ability of governments to implement those already adopted; on the other hand, the need to consolidate public finances encouraged the adoption of other types of diametrically opposed reforms compared to the previous ones. The result of these maneuvers has led, at European level, to a complex and contradictory institutional context, which presents "situations of uncertainty and fluidity".

At the socio-economic level, the economic crisis has accentuated territorial and social differentiation, showing the negative effects of globalization. In this scenario, the resentment of the most disadvantaged communities (rural and suburban) emerged clearly in

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9 Resolution of the Committee of the Regions on the Charter for Multilevel Governance in Europe 2014/C 174/01

10 See for example, in the Italian experience the l. 234/2012.

11 See A. D’Atena, Diritto regionale, Torino 2013, 381 ss. also for comparative analysis.


13 The description is from the report Reflecting on the future of the European Union. The View from local and regional authorities, written by M. Bruter-S-Harrison-F. Bicchi, Bruxelles 2018
the electoral consultations held in the UK and Italy and pushed toward the request for autonomy and participation by regional bodies.

4) The fourth period has been opened by the debate on the future of Europe in 2017 that refocused the need of a Europe at three dimension and on the role of regional and local authorities in the process of European integration, considering the importance this aspect has to democratic participation of levels closest to citizens and to a correct implementation of European policies.

One of the main reports of this debate, in fact, has emphasized how regional authorities retain a key role as "communicators" on the functionality of multilevel system and that "the EU's positive role in daily life is not visible if the story is not told locally."\(^{14}\)

Many documents have been published upon this theme, within which three are more relevant for this analysis:

a) the Task Force for subsidiarity and proportionality and for "doing less in a more efficient way", established by the President of the Commission on November 14, 2017, that on July 10, 2018 delivered its final report to the President of the Commission. The report states, in summary, that for a better definition of European policies and greater efficiency in the use of resources new operating methods are needed that will allow an effective participation of national, local and regional authorities, which play a fundamental role in the practical implementation of European legislation. The working method should lead to a "more active subsidiarity" ("Active Subsidiarity"), which is also suitable for ensuring greater understanding and acceptance of the reasons why some policies are implemented at the level of the European Union\(^{15}\).

b) Reflections on the role of local and regional authorities were also stimulated by the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) and the associations of local and regional governments throughout the European Union\(^{16}\): in particular, during the European Week of Regions and cities, the president of the European Committee of the Regions presented his annual speech on "The State of the European Union: the view of Regions and Cities" (9 October 2018), where a double functionality of EU and Regions was underlined: "The cities and regions need the European Union. The European Union needs its cities and regions". This debate stated that the democratic foundations of the

\(^{14}\) Ibidem, 12

\(^{15}\) The activity of the Task Force was taken up in the speech by the President of the European Commission on the State of the Union on 12 September 2018 (Jean Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, State of the Union 2018 (12 September 2018)).

\(^{16}\) the 4 July 2018, on the iniziative of the Committee of the Regions and together with the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), the mayors and presidents of the EU cities and regions met in Brussels to discuss the main challenges they face in view of the changes in the European context (Future of Europe: European Committee of the Regions and local government associations join forces. Comitato delle Regioni, Press release del 4 luglio 2018, Multi-level governance and devolution. https://cor.europa.eu/en/news/Pages/Future-of-europe-CoR-and-local-government-associations-join-forces.aspx). The meeting followed the resolution of the European Parliament of 3 July 2018, which includes the request for permanent participation of the CEMR in the development of EU policies, and is part of a broader debate that continued with the Week European of Regions and cities from 8 to 11 October 2018.
EU must be rebuilt on three dimensions and not just on two (EU and states) and that only by strengthening the territories the EU can be strengthened.

c) the Bucharest Declaration of the European Committee of the Regions “Building the EU from the ground up with our regions and cities” adopted during the 8th European Summit of Regions and Cities the 14-15 March 2019 where two main point were addressed: a) Strengthening the democratic foundation of the European Union; b) Anchoring the EU’s action locally to build a better future for our citizens.

3. The role of regional differentiation in the Italian experience.

Italy is characterized by a strong differentiation between territories whose causes have historical roots. This differentiation was the base for the introduction in 1947 Constitution of a Regional system, with a division of competences (legislative, administrative) established in the Constitution and guaranteed by Constitutional adjudication. Strong differentiation and historical reasons brought to the introduction, besides the 15 Ordinary Regions (symmetrical regionalism), of 5 special regions (asymmetrical regionalism) each with special competences and resources. Within special regions, the situation in Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol is even more peculiar, with the presence of two autonomous provinces with the same powers of the Regions.

The reasons under the presence of asymmetric regionalism besides symmetric regionalism was to preserve specific identities (i.e. language in TAA and Valle D’Aosta), to avoid secessionist movement (Sicily) or for international reasons (Friuli Venezia Giulia and TAA). All special Regions have fiscal benefits – although they have been partially reduced over the years – which has led to feelings of resentment from others regions.

This was the organization on paper. In fact, if special Regions began to work in 1947 (Sicily even earlier in 1946), due to political reasons (relationships among political parties) linked to the special situation of Italy in international scenario, ordinary Regions were established and begin to act only in 1970.

In 1992 biggest changes occurred in the international scenario and in Italian political system that signed the passage from the I to the II Republic: local authorities mayor became directly elected (1993), the national electoral system changed (1994) and two incisive constitutional reforms (in 1999 and 2001) drawn completely the Italian regionalism. Ordinary Regions were given the majority of competences (general competences plus shared competences with the State in some fields) while the State was

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17 Emanuele Felice, The Roots of a Dual Equilibrium: GDP, Productivity and Structural Change in the Italian Regions in the Long-run (1871-2011) Banca d’Italia Economic History Working Papers, Number 40 – August 2017, which explores the evolution of Italy’s regional inequality in the long run, from around Unification (1871) until our days (2011), thus analyzing the roots of Italy’s dual development and identifying different historical phases along this path.

18 See art. 116 Const. par. 1-2 : “Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Sardinia, Sicily, Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol and Valle d’Aosta/Vallée d’Aoste have special forms and conditions of autonomy pursuant to the special statutes adopted by constitutional law. The Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol Region is composed of the autonomous provinces of Trent and Bolzano.”

19 For a whole description of the Italian regionalism, the origin and the evolution, see S. Mangiameli (ed), Italian Regionalism: Between Unitary Traditions and Federal Processes. Investigating Italy’s Form of State, Springer Heidelberg 2017.
reserved some competences (117 Cost.) The changes in division of competences were “formally” so huge, that on paper the Italian State appeared to have “formally” less competence than a federal state. Again, the constitutional transformations of the regional system were justified by several factors: changes in the political parties, the huge Italian debt and the necessity to join the Euro, the changes in the international scenario (with the end of the Cold War) and the need to adopt the Maastricht Treaty.

In 2001, in order to preserve the presence of special regions and, at the same time, reduce the gap with ordinary regions two clauses were introduced: the first one provided, on a provisional basis (i.e. “until the Charters are updated”), for the application to special Regions of that part of the new law governing ordinary autonomy that provides for “wider forms of autonomy than those already attributed” (article 10 of Constitutional Law no. 3/2001); the second one permitted the partial extension of special autonomy to individual ordinary Regions (article 116, par. 3: “Additional special forms and conditions of autonomy, related to the areas specified in art. 117, paragraph three and paragraph two, letter l) - limited to the organisational requirements of the Justice of the Peace - and letters n) and s), may be attributed to other Regions by State Law, upon the initiative of the Region concerned, after consultation with the local authorities, in compliance with the principles set forth in art. 119. Said Law is approved by both Houses of Parliament with the absolute majority of their members, on the basis of an agreement between the State and the Region concerned.”). While the first clause has had a broad application, the second one was never applied until 2018, because the regional initiatives promoted immediately after the constitutional reform of 2001 have never reached any agreement with the Government.

4. The evolution of the Italian regionalism, from constitutional protection and political exploitation

The evolution of Italian regionalism swung between autonomy and strong centralization, apart and often despite the constitutional changes.

Just after the constitutional reform of 2001, the State began a process of strong centralization to keep back competences, with the consent of the Constitutional Court that “re-writed” the distribution of competences between State and Regions. Emblematic is the use of the principle of subsidiarity – established in the Constitution for the distribution of administrative competences – to disregard the division of competence and justify the State legislative action in some competences formally attributed to Regions (this mechanism is called “call for subsidiarity”). The huge Constitutional litigation and case law referred to Regionalism – which counts every year approximately 50% of the case law, that is more than 100 decisions, – during this 17 years determines a reality of Italian regionalism completely different to what is written in the Constitution. The process of centralization was extremely strong during economic crisis, with an extremely invasive State and a deep reduction of funding. During the years of economic crises (2008-2016) two main institutional transformation were proposed: the ‘nearly abolition’ of Italian Provinces (which have roots in pre-unitary State history), with the allocation of administrative competences mainly to Regions, and

20 See Stelio Mangiameli, Le Regioni tra crisi globale e neocentralismo, Milano, Giuffrè, 2013
a Constitutional reform aimed at changing the nature and functions of the Second Chamber, but with a strong reallocation of regional competences at the central level. However, while the first reform was enacted (with many problems of implementations and functionality) the second one was rejected by referendum that had a huge popular participation.

If during economic crises it is not surprising a general process of centralization, it is also true that in Italy it was very intense. The ‘subconscious’ opinion is that ‘centralization’ is necessary because the central level works better than the decentralized level, despite the results achieved by Italian Regions during this 17 years (infra).

The framework of Italian regionalism is currently characterized as follow: the State cannot formally intervene (by Constitution) in regional competences but it substantially did, with the consensus of the Constitutional Court. The financial model is strongly centralized: the implementation law was enacted only in 2009 and carried out years after, but it has been never applied because of the European crisis. The intergovernmental relationships are mainly based on a system of Conferences (3 models of conferences) that involves Regions, State and cities: this system was originally introduced for informal collaboration but became the main decisional place for State and Regions consultations; many reforms aimed at modifying the second Chamber were proposed but they were never approved.

The negative attitude toward Regionalism in Italy have political (and cultural) reasons: a part from “Special regions” the Regionalism has always been in the ‘hands’ of national political parties and has always been used as an ‘instrument’ for political purposes at national level.

Looking at the three theoretical sentences listed in par. 1, we can say, that regarding the Dahl statement, in Italy the division of competences has always been in the hand of the State despite the constitutional provisions; considering the Elazar sentence, the evolution of the intergovernmental relations in Italy have seen a balance between unity and differentiation that has often brought to uniformity.

5. **Role and value of Regions in concrete: what Regions have done since 2001.**


22 See Paolo Colasante, *The Principle of Fair Cooperation in the Italian Legal Order and the Intergovernmental Relations Between State and Regions*, in online review Italian Papers on Federalism n. 3/2017; Eduardo Gianfrancesco,

23 For a study on the dynamics between the State and Regions in relation to the political parties system in Italy see C. Desideri, *Regioni politiche e territori. Per una storia del regionalismo italiano*, Milano 2015.

During years Regions enacted a vast amount of legislation in matters of their competences with different results. Systematic studies conducted on regional legislation since 2001 by the Institute for the Study of regionalism, federalism and self government\(^{25}\) show the ‘weight’ of regional legislation in different types of competences, through which is possible to state that general improvements and innovations were done in social care and migration policies, agriculture and environment.

Economic crisis have had a strong impact on Italian regionalism that has been characterized in last decade by a general process of re-centralization, which seemed the most appropriate remedy to face the financial crisis\(^{26}\). During this period Regions has been important social cushion, while less improvement (with some exceptions) were done in productive activities (industry and commerce) and economic development, where the transformations of the economic constitution – linked to the EU and globalization processes – condition very much regional policies. In this context, the choice of Region to give priority to “services to communities” instead of “structural investment” could be explained with the role of Regions as expression of local communities.

In order to better understand the added value of regional differentiation in Italy we can analyze two symptomatic sectors:

\textit{a) Social services.}

In the case of social services, regional differentiation played an important role in the implementation of the principle of equality especially during the years of the economic crisis: in those years, in fact, Regions operated almost like social safety cushion in a situation of almost total absence of State in defining even the essential levels of care. If theoretical reflections lead to the consideration of regional differentiation in this sector as a risk for inequality, the analysis of the exercise of competences reveals a total absence of the State and a substitute role of Regions in guaranteeing substantial equality\(^{27}\).

Many documents adopted during the \textit{Reflections on the future of the European Union} underline the demand for a new European social model\(^{28}\). In the light of the Italian experience, the social model that one intends to implement at the EU level cannot disregard the involvement of subnational entities.

\textit{b) Policies on productive activities and economic development.}

\(^{25}\) “Tendenze e problemi della legislazione regionale” in \textit{Rapporto sulla legislazione tra Stato, Regioni e Unione europea (Camera dei deputati)} available on the website of Issirfa, under the section I.S.S.I.R.F.A. → Pubblicazioni → Rapporti ISSiRFA-Rapporto sulla legislazione tra Stato, Regioni e Unione europea (Camera dei deputati). \url{http://www.issirfa.cnr.it/rapporto-camera.html}

\(^{26}\) Su questi aspetti e per una lettura critica delle misure ‘anticrisi’ v. ampiamente S. Mangiameli, \textit{Le Regioni italiane tra crisi globale e neocentralismo}, Milano 2013.


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A different situation emerges for policies on productive activities, where the conditionings of globalization and of the EU internal market have led to a reduction of the role of Regions, especially during the economic crisis, or to a sort of subordination of regional policies to State guidelines. Emblematic is the case of trade, where the anti-crisis State legislation pushed towards greater liberalization and deregulation of productive sectors with profound effects on regional competence.

Despite this different experience, several socio-economic surveys, European documents and some scholars underline the importance of Regions in this sector also in a context of European integration and globalization.

If anything, regional experience in this field leads us to others considerations.

The analysis of regional competences and case law shows that in most of the sectors included in the productive activities it is not possible a strict division of competences between State and Regions. These sectors tend rather to become an indistinct area of policies due to two factors: on the one hand, the State can act through transversal competences and the ‘call’ for subsidiarity; on the other hand, the Regions have progressively replaced sectoral laws (i.e. commerce, industry) with laws that promote the entire regional economic system, envisage a plurality of interventions and denote a comprehensive vision of economic development.

These circumstances reveal that participation in the EU process pushes toward a management of public policies not structured in a rigid division of roles, but to a different modus operandi that requires the involvement of all entities for the realization of the same objectives. This modus operandi requires a resumption of ‘institutional collaboration’, well-known in federal experiences. The cooperative model, which could match with regional "specialization", could help to adapt policies to real differentiation of territories.

29 G. SAPUTELLI, Lo Stato regionale italiano e il riparto di competenze in materia di attività produttive e sviluppo economico, tra devoluzione e accentramento, on www.federalismi.it (online review), n. 22/ 2017.

30 From the administrative point of view, See also L. Cassetti-S. Ricci, L’obiettivo dello sviluppo economico al cospetto delle autonomie territoriali: dimensioni attuali e trasformazioni delle funzioni amministrative esercitate da Regioni ed enti locali, in L’attuazione degli articoli 118 e 119 della Costituzione. I riflessi sull’ordinamento degli enti locali, a cura di B. Caravita, Napoli 2015, 117-152.


33 OCSE, OECD Studies on SMEs and Entrepreneurship, Italy key issue and policies, 2014, p. 197 ss.

34 On the principle of loyal cooperation in Italian and in comparison with the American and German federal systems see S. Mangiameli, Il principio cooperativo nell’esperienza italiana del primo e del secondo regionalismo, Roma 2008.

In fact, due to the transformations connected to globalization, especially in economic policies, "real" differentiation corresponds fewer and fewer to "institutional" differentiation.

In relation to Italian situation, for example, a recent study carried out by CENSIS shows a "redefinition of the economic geography of territories, in the complex dialectic that has been created between places and global flows, of which only some regions have become interpreters”. The report highlights the "infra-regional" gaps through a "mosaic" (p. 15) that shows the presence of "trans-regional territories characterized by significant homogeneity" which require homogeneous policies or common/joint actions (p. 10). This circumstance suggests the need to look at territory (its morphology, its evolution and socio-economic processes) and opens up new responsibilities for regional institutions that can adequately deal with these challenges if they equip themselves with “micro-dimension sensors” able to offer an effective representation of what happens in local systems (p. 21). Therefore, unlike other parts of the world (US and Asia), where big metropolitan cities (global cities) have occupied the scene of economic growth and social development, socio-economic data confirms that in Italy “the territorial dimension (regional, provincial or municipal) continues to have a very strong centrality ”(p. 13).

For policies on production activities, it is possible to use horizontal cooperation (through the current legal instruments already provided in the Constitution: art. 117 last paragraph) to "support" the current differentiated regionalism process (infra).

The Italian experience in these two examples demonstrates that the role of regional bodies could be precious in some cases, but also that there are policies that cannot be better implemented at the regional level (i.e. big infrastructures) and some others requires shared competences or strong vertical and horizontal collaborations (economic developments).

The analysis of the Italian experience of regionalism confirms the statement of Brandeis, because it tells us the added value of differentiation in some policies, but has to be supported by the consideration that in others case, while the Regions are not sufficient, the monitoring or substitute role of the State is necessary. For instance, it is symptomatic, and well perceived, how regional autonomy has brought to great innovation but also divergence in health care system.

Regional differentiation is having great attention in Italy because of the recent initiatives on asymmetric regionalism, on which there is already a very broad scientific debate.

6. Present challenges of Italian regionalism: the request for more autonomy and asymmetry.

In 2018 three Regions (Emilia-Romagna, Lombardy, Veneto) formally activated the procedure of asymmetric regionalism of art. 116 par. 36 and others Regions have started to discuss this opportunity37.

36 See the Report of the Senate n. 104/1 of March 2019, 14 ss.
37 Ibidem, 23
These requests immediately opened many juridical problems for the application and the implementation of art. 116 Cost. Par. 3 (on the procedures, the subjects, the controls, etc.). From the national (and political) point of view, it has to be noted that the implementation of differentiated regionalism is one of the main point of the Government program.

The aspirations behind the regional requests – it has to be noted that Lombardy, Veneto and Emilia Romagna are the richest Regions of Italy – could be summarized in: more autonomy, more resources and more differentiation, where differentiation in this case is equivalent to ‘quality’.

The process of asymmetric regionalism raises also some fears from others Regions (especially in the South of Italy), which could be summarized in: more differentiation, where differentiation is synonym of inequality and is expressed in a different allocation of resources and in a growing divide between North and South.

It is true that the divide North/South in Italy has increased in recent years: “regional imbalances still play a major role nowadays: Italy’s North-South divide in terms of GDP has no parallels in any other advanced country of a similar size, and southern Italy is, after Eastern Europe, the biggest underdeveloped area inside the European Union”.

These circumstances has opened a huge debate on the topic and numerous studies have already been published. The analysis and studies from the research centers Issirfa and Svimez state that the process of asymmetric regionalism could be an opportunity at some conditions. Among the many problems of applications and implementations, three main points need to be clearly defined in order to preserve equality and unity: fiscal federalism, establishment of essential levels of care, efficient equalization system. These crucial points have to be considered in a decentralized system apart from autonomy.

7. Conclusion: ‘coming together … or moving apart?’ Unity, diversity and collaboration.

Looking at the Italian experience, it seems urgent to learn that unity does not mean centralization but that it could be achieved through differentiation.

The need to change approach (cultural and political) is urgent because of the European and international challenges, specifically because of economic changes related to globalization. For example, recent economic forecast says that Italian GDP growth is at the last position in Europe.

The South ‘question’ (with the increasing gap in wealth and services) and the (new) North ‘question’ (with the requests for more autonomy) have to be seen in this perspective. Obviously both evoke the necessity to have mechanisms of unification (mainly linked to the unity of State and of citizenship), which don’t necessarily bright toward centralization. Rather, it is true that a strong regionalism require a strong State in the equalization policy, in monitoring and replacement.

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38 Emanuele Felice, cit.
Current situations require instead of a rigid division of competences, more collaboration in the definition of policies and more subsidiarity, that is to say, less State where it is not necessary (in the North) and more where it is requested (South).

This is valid also for the supranational level, in EU, where a clear application of subsidiarity in some policies would be crucial: it is almost evident, for example, in the Migration policy.

European Union has played an important role for territorial differentiation if we compare the European and the US systems or if we examine what is happening in UK devolution with Brexit. In the first case, the impact of globalization in US has increased the role of cities that are asking for more autonomy, with an amplification of differentiations and gaps between rural places and cities much more than in Europe.

The UK case is peculiar since Brexit is jeopardize devolution and the role of Regions: outside the EU the three Nations are losing not only funds and opportunities, but also mechanisms of participation at national and European levels, with fewer and fewer relevance of these levels at the European and global markets. These problems are mainly linked to internal order (UK constitutional structure) but show how much the intergovernmental relations and unity within a country could be linked to the participation to the EU integration process.

The European Union other than unity among European states and peoples has helped unity inside countries and enhanced the role and participation of territories. These territories are asking for more participation, and Europe has to find a way to hear these request. A recovery of a Europe at three dimension could be a useful answer against the rise of sovranism: last election in Italy or Brexit referendum in UK reveal the link between results and differentiations/gap of territories. It is necessary to stimulate territorial productivities and resources, to establish a clear financial system, equalization measures and to enhance mechanism of regional participation.

In this regard, we can quote what has been said regarding the Italian experience: "institutional differentiation should be considered as an opportunity given to territorial political class that allows to better meet the needs of populations, instead of the State, thus limiting the disadvantages of globalization", because it is "the real positive and negative differentiation that now requires an institutional adjustment" 39.

Regional differentiation could push toward integration or disintegration, for this reason, only in dealing seriously with this theme European Union could continue to be the innovative experiment it has always been compared to other federal experiences.

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39 S. Mangiameli, I problemi della differenziazione e della omogeneità nello stato regionale. 2018