

TV – Politics in Italy: Analysis of an involved system



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ABSTRACT

Writing about such a delicate issue on the eve of an election that 'could' change the fate of Italy for the next few years is a profession in which it would be

better not to venture. Too many variables and many question marks that today do not find the answer that. All citizens have been waiting far too long. On the other hand, being a member of the research group 'Grupo de Investigación en Estructura, Historia y Contenidos de la Comunicación (GREHCCO)' for almost six years now, as well as the great admiration and academic recognition for one of my great teachers, Dr. Ramon Reig, was the impetus to write a reflection on the current situation of the TV-politics relationship in Italy, analyzing their 'gears' from a critical (and not political) point of view, on the eve of the election of 2018 March 4th.

Keywords: Democracy, Television, Italian politics, Communicative structure.

1 INTRODUCTION

Writing about such a delicate issue on the eve of the election of 2018 that 'could' change the fate of Italy for the next few years is a profession in which it would be better not to venture. Too many variables and many question marks that today do not find the answer that. All citizens have been waiting far too long. On the other hand, being a member of the research group 'Grupo de Investigación en Estructura, Historia y Contenidos de la Comunicación (GREHCCO)' for almost six years now, as well as the great admiration and academic recognition for one of my great teachers, Dr. Ramon Reig, was the impetus to write a reflection on the current situation of the TV-politics relationship in Italy, analyzing their 'gears' from a critical (and not political) point of view, on the eve of the election of next March 4th.

Taking a small historical excursus, Italian television, understood as a public service, since its inception has always been at the service of the majority party of the Government. "When, in the mid-seventies, Rai gave life to a second newspaper television (the "Tg2 Studio aperto"), the newspaper of the first network continued, in official programs, to be called "Telegiornale", as if it were still presenting itself as the only (and controlled) holder of the privilege of informing Italians. It became Tg1 only later, waiting for the political qualification of both directors – respectively Christian Democrat and Socialist – to recognize the de facto dependence of the Public Service on the prevailing



political forces". A system that reached a perfect hierarchy towards the end of the eighties, when the same state company published the names of the reference directors of the three news programs of reference, with the respective political acronyms of the parties to which they belonged, creating in fact a clear institutional division.

The evolution of the Italian political-television framework will find its maximum expression in the mid-nineties, when Silvio Berlusconi, after founding the three networks of the Fininvest group (today the infotainment company that controls the three networks along with many other cable and satellite channels in Italy and abroad, and numerous online services is Mediaset), Canale 5, Italia 1 and Rete 4, respectively in 1980, 1982 and 1984, decided to go into politics.

The impact on the information sphere understood as a mass communicative tool was sensational. The knight used what he had created in the first fifteen years of activity in journalism, turning it into a propaganda vehicle to promote his electoral campaign. Suffice it to say that his first "take the field" (making clear reference to a football language, a great passion of Silvio Berlusconi, among other things owner until 2017 of the AC Milan football team) to Italian citizens was aired in a message to unified networks to the whole nation. A slogan that earned him a first landslide victory in the 1994 elections. From the dawn of this television-political entanglement in the distant seventies, more than forty years have passed today. The technological tool has evolved, the channels have multiplied, but the use has remained almost unchanged.

Let's briefly analyze the current context taking into consideration the same television networks existing in the eighties, to have a reference framework on the eve of the next electoral round. State television follows the prerogative of the Government party: just think of the orientations of the numerous political programs and debate in the various national television stations. On the same wavelength, the three Mediaset channels that, while not supporting an openly partisan electoral campaign for their founder (a separate chapter deserves the Rete 4 channel, of clear and declared 'Berlusconi profession', understood in an almost 'mystical' sense of the term) reflect a message that represents a propaganda vehicle that moves along a center-right trail.

The introduction of the law on par condicio of 22 February 2000 regulated from a legal point of view the TV-political binomial on the occasion of elections – guaranteeing that "radio and television broadcasters must ensure to all political subjects with impartiality and equity access to information and political communication (art. 2 c. 1)". A law that, as you can imagine, has been strongly criticized by many political exponents, and with particular vigor by Silvio Berlusconi, who has always relied on the private ownership of his television stations and on the right of political representativeness, understood as greater participation for the government party.

Television still represents today, in the age of the internet, the greatest vehicle of information for Italians. A report on consumption released by AGCOM in February 2018 confirmed that television



is the most considered information medium for the importance and reliability of information. Starting from this data it is necessary to underline another element of great importance: a 'digital backwardness' of Italians justified in large part by an increasingly 'old' society, where life expectancy and the number of pensioners are increasing more and more, to the detriment of the birth rate and youth work. The latter fact reflects the importance that the 'Marconi Galaxy' plays in Italian society and the increasingly strong attention that should be directed towards a systematic control of the television medium, even more so on the eve of an electoral appointment. The long journey 'arm in arm' started in the seventies should ring an alarm bell in a reality that after more than forty years has not managed to completely separate the two powers; a structure that still reflects a high level of political parallelism with a strong state intervention (just think of the long periods of censorship not only in Italy, but in all the nations that fall within this system), flanked by a parliamentary model of public television management light years away from the other two reference models in the world information system (corporate democracy of northern Europe and liberal North Atlantic).

The reality of the TV-politics binomial in Italy remains in the hands of a few groups. Whether they are public or private, constitute a risk for the plurality of the system, becoming a contaminated 'fourth estate' that no longer performs the task for which it was created (informing the people of the activities of the Government without any kind of orientation), but on the contrary threatens free and impartial information, influencing and 'building' a mass consciousness and opinion that represents a very serious risk for a modern democracy.



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