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# The Socio-Political and Ideological-Cultural Elements of the Italian Nation and the National Minority Question in Italy

Law 482, Norms Concerning the Protection of Historical Linguistic Minorities, perhaps historically the most important law on national minorities in Italian history, was enacted in 1999. This article analyses the socio-political and ideological-cultural elements of the Italian nation that led to the increase in political attention to the national minority question in Italy that was required for such a law to have been accepted. The two endogenous socio-political elements are the definition of the Italian nation in the civic sense and its crisis, which was induced by the Northern League (*Lega Nord*), as well as its relationship with the ethnic elements of the Italian nationality, such as the Italian language and its dialects. There are two exogenous socio-political elements as well: the weakness of the Italian civic nation caused by the historic presence of socio-political divisions on the state territory; and the absence of the theme of nationality and ethnicity in the intellectual debate of the post-war democratic period. The conclusions seem to confirm that, thanks to the new debate about Italian nationality in the nineties, the theme of national minorities could become an element of the current political discourse in Italy.

Keywords: nation, national minorities, Italy

# *Družbeno-politična in ideološko-kulturna opredelitev elementov italijanske nacije in vprašanje narodnih manjšin v Italiji*

*Zakon 482, Določila za varstvo zgodovinskih jezikovnih manjšin, verjetno najbolj pomemben zakon o narodnih manjšinah v italijanski zgodovini, je bil izglasovan leta 1999. Prispevek analizira družbeno-politične in ideološko-kulturne elemente italijanske nacije, ki so pripomogli h krepitvi politične pozornosti za vprašanje narodnih manjšin v Italiji. Slednja je bila namreč potrebna za sprejetje zakona. Dva družbeno-politična endogena elementa zadevata opredelitev italijanske nacije v državljanskem smislu in njeno krizo, ki jo je povzročila Severna liga, ter njen odnos do etničnih elementov italijanske narodnosti, kot sta italijanski jezik in njegova narečja. Upoštevana sta tudi dva eksogena družbeno-politična elementa: šibkost italijanske nacije v državljanskem smislu zaradi zgodovinske prisotnosti družbeno-političnih ločitev na državnem ozemlju ter odsotnost intelektualnih debat o nacionalnosti in etničnosti v povojnem demokratičnem obdobju. Iz ugotovitev izhaja, da so tematike, povezane z narodnimi manjšinami, postale del tekočega političnega diskurza v Italiji zaradi nove debate o italijanski nacionalnosti v devetdesetih letih.*

*Ključne besede: nacija, narodne manjšine, Italija*

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# 1. Introduction

The topic of the national minorities has not traditionally been in the forefront of modern Italy's policies and legislation, despite the fact that the Constitution of the Republic of Italy, in its article 6, defines the safeguard of linguistic minorities through special norms. In the late 1980s De Mauro (1987, XIII) observed that in Italy the linguistic diversity and the minority issue belonged more to the sub-culture and/or the realm of folklore rather than to intellectual debate. Any discussion on these themes sounded almost reactionary. The recognition of minority languages and the introduction of active policies for their safeguarding were equated with questioning the unity of the nation and even its very existence (Stolfo 2009, 207). Moreover, the claims of the various linguistic minorities for the safeguard of their languages and communities were perceived as an expression of localisms, reluctance to accept advancement in Italian terms and inclusion in the wider society. Most intellectuals perceived the minority issue as a problem of the past. They were persuaded that the world would become uniform and thus outgrow linguistic diversity. Development was seen as viable only if supported by the dominant cultural and linguistic values. Moreover, equality traditionally meant linguistic and cultural unification.

In the post-war period in Italy – as opposed to the 19th and beginning of the 20th century until the end of World War II – beside the specific theme of the national minorities, the broader concepts of nation, nationality and ethnicity were not at the centre of public opinion, of politics and of intellectual discourse. Up to the end of the previous century the literature about the Italian nation was indeed quite modest. At the European level in the same period new socio-political situations which started to concentrate national identities mainly on ethnicity were clear: they expressed a redefinition of the concepts of nation-state and sovereignty and were the subject of debate about asymmetrical models of accommodating the diversity of nationally and linguistically mixed regions (Keating 2007). They led also to forms of new nationalisms, ethno-nationalisms, ethnocentric regionalisms and xenophobia. These phenomena were familiar also to Italy. The electoral and political successes of the Northern League (*Lega Nord*) animated a new debate about the Italian national identity, especially from the point of view of the polemic against its political programmes to divide the northern part of the state from the rest. This issue also raised the question of the late political unification and of the late democratisation of the Italian nation, of the weak legitimacy of its institutions, of the lack of suitable leading cadres and of the role of the post-war anti-systemic Catholicism and socialism (Cartocci 2002, 15). In this framework intellectuals and the general public began to understand

that the lack of discourse about nationality at all levels was, as a matter of fact, a negative circumstance. The consequences were clear, for example, in the low level of social solidarity and civic sense, which are typical in Italy nowadays (Galli della Loggia 1996, 137–139).

It is no coincidence that specific national legislation about national minorities in Italy appeared in the 1990s, more than fifty years after the introduction of article 6 in the Constitution. The first attempts to develop legislation about minorities date back to the 1970s, when cultural and political groups, associations and movements for the recognition and promotion of minority rights gained attention on the political level. In that period several proposals were presented in parliament concerning both a framework legislation about minorities in Italy and specific laws for national minority communities, but none was approved (Stolfo 2005, 151). In 1999 law 482 introduced new norms for the safeguard of the historical linguistic minorities[1] in Italy. In the same spirit, in 2001, the Italian state voted through law 38 for the safeguarding of the Slovene linguistic minority in Friuli Venezia Giulia, a law which had been lobbied for by the Slovene national community in Italy since the 1970s.

Law 482/1999, Article 2, defines the safeguarded national minorities and minority languages in Italy, namely Albanian, Catalan, German, Greek, Slovene, Croat, French, Franco-Provencal, Friulian, Ladin, Occitan and Sardinian. The law does not thus comply with international and European legislation regarding dialects and languages of migrant communities.[2] At the same time it defines Italian as the official language of the republic as a sort of "protection of the majority against the protection of the minorities" (Stolfo 2009, 216). This provision is included in as it is not present in the Italian Constitution. Moreover, it stresses its priority and primacy in comparison with the minority languages, which do not have any official status on the national level. As they can be used in the public administration in the municipalities where the minorities are historically present they have, practically, a "partially official" status on the local level (Poggieschi 2009, 23).

Before the vote on Law 482/1999 was held, only three minorities in the border area had been recognized: the Francophone minority in the Valle d'Aosta Region, the German (and partially Ladin) minority in the Bolzano Province and the Slovene minority (in the Trieste and Gorizia area, but not in Udine) (Cisilino 2004, 105; Palici di Suni Prat 2002, 106, 2006, 639). Their legal status arose from the international agreements between Italy and their kin-states and, in the case of the Valle d'Aosta Region and the Bolzano Province, also from the special status of their statutes.[3] The other linguistic minorities were mainly without any legal safeguard.

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The approval of law 482/1999 was the outcome of a variety of factors. First, the Council of Europe and its most recent documents for the safeguard of national minorities and minority or regional languages applied pressure on Italy to acquiesce in the new European legal framework (Cisilino 2004, 101–104; Palici di Suni Prat 2000, 102, 2002, 106). Furthermore, there was the influence of other international provisions; for example, the Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, which was approved in 1992 by the United Nations Organization in the spirit of article 27 of the International Treaty for Civil and Political Rights of 1966. Also at an internal level a new sensibility regarding similar themes was explicit. In the 1990s some regions began paying greater attention to the problem of ethnicity (Palici di Suni Prat 2000, 102, 2002, 102–106; Stolfo 2009, 178–179), adopting a series of laws in favour of regional languages and local dialects in the spirit of the safeguarding of cultural and linguistic heritage and the conservation of local identities.

Moreover, the socio-political situation during the same decade in Italy was a factor that made it easier for the national minorities to find their space on the political agenda as the theme of nationality and ethnicity became topical again. The Northern League party raised the question of the unity of the Italian nation and state and, as a reaction to this, a new intellectual and political debate about Italian nationality and its relation with the regional identities flourished.

The central research question of the present work thus regards the role of the concept of the Italian nation, as defined through its ideological-cultural and socio-political elements, as a factor influencing political attention towards the issue of national minorities. It can be therefore argued that the revival of the intellectual and political debate about national identity supported the inclusion of the national minority issue on national and local political agendas.

The analysis of the Italian nation and nationality will consider two endogenous aspects. The first is linked to the concept of the Italian nation in the civic sense. The second examines the relations between this concept and the ethnic elements of Italian nationality, such as language and dialects. The work then focuses on the analysis of two socio-political elements: first, the weakness of the Italian civic nation as a result of a historically influenced socio-political fragmentation of the national territory; and second, the fact that the theme of nationality and ethnicity was ignored at the level of intellectual debate in the post-war and democratic periods. These elements are exogenous as regards the Italian nationality, as they concern the context of the socio-political development of the state. Special attention will be given to the 1990s as relevant to the issue of the Italian nationality and nation-state, as well as to the issue of national minority protection.

## *40*  2. Methodological Framework

This work is based on the study of the relevant scientific literature, mainly the works of those Italian authors who have discussed the theme of the Italian nation and nationality in numerous disciplinary fields: anthropological, linguistic, political, sociological and historical. Particular attention is devoted to the ethnic elements of Italian nationality, such as dialects and regional identities. Moreover, the analysis of the issue being researched is based on the scientific literature about national minorities in Italy, with particular focus on the legal aspects of how they are safeguarded.

The work is part of the research project "Management of Ethnic-Language Diversity: The Case of the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region". The author developed the study within her PhD project at the Faculty for Social Sciences of the University in Ljubljana, carried out in the SLORI (Slovene Research Institute) institute in Trieste. Her activities in the ethnically-mixed borderland environment of Italy and Slovenia indeed favoured a wide review of the literature (mainly in Italian) in which the issue being researched has been discussed.

## 3. The Italian Nation as a "Lost Subject of History"

Because of various socio-political factors, after the Second World War Italian nationality became "the lost subject of history" (Banti 2000, IX; Galli della Loggia 1996, 19, 1998, 129). There was no space for any further development of the nation as a concept involving a common fate and solidarity among individuals (Cartocci 2002, 14). Sociologists and historiographers considered that the national identity did not need to be improved, as it was already a previously determined fact (Banti 2000, IX). Most Italian intellectuals thought that democracy did not need the concept of nation (Rusconi 1997, 35). Consequently, the same attitude prevailed also toward the other national identities present in the Italian state, such as those of national minorities.

In the new socio-political framework of the post-war democratic Italian state the priorities were the reconstruction of the country and the consolidation of a democratic society (Galli della Loggia 1998, 129). The 1960s and 1970s were characterized by social and cultural modernization, which led to a new model of social integration based on a new system of values, wherein consumerism and

the striving for individualistic well-being were in the foreground. The concept of nation was therefore limited to popular sub-culture and to literary-nostalgic forms of expression (Rusconi 1993, 17–18).

Despite its socio-economic post-war development, Italy did not manage to overcome its anti-modernity and its past (Bollati 1983, 201; Galli della Loggia 1998, 139). The Risorgimento itself unsuccessfully tried to create a new Italy in the sense of socio-political modernization. For this reason two stereotypes gained ground – on the one hand the belief that Italy was not modern enough and on the other hand that whatever modernization indeed took place was as a matter of fact harmful.

Beyond these factors, which were linked to the development of the modern Italian democratic country, the concept of nation in the post-war period posed difficulties because of specific historical reasons which did not allow a post-war clarification with regard to the collective and individual trauma and the different memories of the fascist period and of the resistance movement. National pride was still equated with fascistic nationalism. The concept of nation has never been set free from this idea on a conceptual or emotional level, and has never achieved a political, cultural and intellectual catharsis (Rusconi 1993, 13, 1994, 233; Chiarini 2003, 260). Mussolini's interpretation of nationalism as the ideology of a totalitarian régime caused a deep crisis in the Italian State and destroyed the positive charge that the idea of nation had developed during the Risorgimento (Galli della Loggia 1996, 3, 1998, 125; Rusconi 1994, 233, 1997, 52).

The events between 1943 and 1945 and soon after the war, which were marked by complicated relations between fascism and the antifascist resistance movements, are some of the reasons for the post-war lack of attention to national identity in political and social intellectual debate (Romano 1994; Rusconi 1993, 1995). The antifascist resistance movements were active in the central and northern parts of Italy, both against the military forces of the Third Reich that occupied those areas from 8 September 1943 till 25 April 1945, and against the Mussolini government that was re-established in the Republic of Salò in northern Italy (Santarelli 1989, 11; Ventrone 1998). The southern part of the State in that period was liberated by the Anglo-American allied forces and constituted an autonomous political entity with its capital in Brindisi.

At the level of the nation the armistice of Italy on 8 September 1943 represented a difficult collective trauma, as it led to the "death of the homeland" (Cartocci 2002, 14; Galli della Loggia 1996, 3, 1998, 125; Rusconi 1994, 233, 1997, 52, 72; Romano 1994, 159–160; Barbè 2000, 180). This was indeed the feeling of

*42* those Italians for whom the concept of nation was an integral part of political and ethical ideals that, with the armistice, drastically came to an end. This event also displayed the ethical and political weakness of Italians, provoking a series of questions regarding their identity as individuals and as a nation in the sense of a state community (Galli della Loggia 1996, 7, 1998, 126–128). The armistice also provoked the demoralization of many Italians, the beginnings of an attitude of despising themselves. The lost war indeed coincided with the end of the state, and this fact was not followed by any national therapy aimed at overcoming the trauma at a collective and intellectual level (Romano 1994, 159–160). After this event the intellectuals did not provide an answer to the problems of collective national identity and in the post-war years they instead offered party-oriented politics (Rusconi 1997, 72).

Furthermore, the Italian resistance movement against fascism and against the German occupation did not enter the collective memory at the level of individual citizens (Rusconi 1995, 9). The behaviour and motivations among the general population in the years 1943-1945 were heterogeneous and they therefore caused discordances at the level of collective identification with this significant event in Italy. In general, the Italian public never received an adequate explanation of this period, especially of the armistice and the resistance movement (Rusconi 1993, 46). In history schoolbooks the resistance movement was generally seen as a myth, whereas fascism was denationalized (Orfei 1994). Italian historiography in the post-war period was strongly conditioned by political ideologies (Soldani & Turi 1993, 13). The positive side of this situation was the civil growth of the history of ideas as a basis of a national tradition; but history was thus placed within the political limits of ideal constructions. The decay of political ideologies at the end of the 1980s reflected their simplification and ideological structure and re-opened the problem of the complexity of Italian reality.

At the level of the Italian historical conscience the unclear relation with fascism and the damage to national pride created an empty space that was easily filled by two main political powers, the Communist and the Catholic. Both movements were inspired by universality and internationality, and therefore there was no space for the concept of nation in their frameworks (Cartocci 2002, 14; Ruzza 2000, 182).

We shall also consider the post-war international scene, which was marked by a separation into two blocks that conditioned the activities of the Italian political parties and their approaches towards nationality and recent history. The post-war leading Christian Democratic Party was allied with the United States, which supported the Italian post-war reconstruction economically (Pieretti 1989;

Tullio-Altan 1997). The party also acted as the opponent of any influence by the Soviet Union, which had an important interlocutor in the Italian Communist party.

Also, the need to discuss the national theme was not a priority any more because of the conclusion of the issue of the Italian national borders. The Paris Peace Treaty of 1947 traced their definitive lines. Only the question of Trieste remained opened, and was solved later: first in 1954 with the international agreement within the London memorandum, and definitively with the Osimo treaty in 1975. In any case, the newly born international political balances in the logic of the division into two blocks did not yield any scope for Italy to break these agreements with the aim of changing the already-defined national borders.

In the post-war period the question both of the Italian nation and of the other national identities, such as those of national minorities, was marginalized because of the socio-economic needs for modernization and because of the incapacity to confront the historical events that took place during and after fascism. The intellectual and social framework therefore did not allow a free discussion of the theme of national minorities.

A revival of the national question began in the 1990s as a reaction to the new political and party movement of the Northern League, which aimed at the secession of the northern part of Italy (called Padania). A new wave of institutional patriotism arose during the Presidency of Carlo Azeglio Ciampi (1999–2006) who launched a "new pedagogy of the Risorgimento" (Caracciolo 2009, 8) and defined the official ideology of the Presidency of the Republic as being based on patriotism and the cult of the Constitution as a strategy against secessionist tendencies (Galli della Loggia 2011). This provoked an anti-secessionist debate which included reflections about the future of the Italian state and the Italian nation among politicians and intellectuals from various political backgrounds and orientations (Huysseune 2004). New attention was paid to Italian identity as well as to patriotic themes and behaviours. Although secession was considered out of the question, being both illegal and anti-constitutional, the anti-secessionist debate opened a new series of reflections on possible political and institutional reforms concerning the modernization of the Italian state.

## *44* 4. The Civic Concept of the Italian Nation

At the level of Italian historical and socio-political thought the debate about what is Italy and who are Italians has been ongoing from the 19th century, focusing especially on the relation between Italy as a national state in the sense of a civic community and Italy as a cultural nation at the level of its ethnic elements. This distinguishes the political project of the Italian state from Italian ethnic identity (Bagnoli 2005, 48).

Ethnicity can be defined as a total of ethno-cultural elements, such as language, cultural traditions, ethno-anthropological features, forms of territorial settlement and socio-organizational characteristics (Rusconi 1997, 37). The nation in the civic sense, on the other hand, is made-up of socio-political elements — the means and abilities of political activity and the shaping of an autonomous national structure of a State. In Italy there are special relations between the ethnic elements of Italian identity and the Italian nation in the civic sense (Rusconi 1993, 31, 2000, 70). The civic nation is made up of citizens of different ethnic origins, originating from various regional or local identities. Nevertheless, the latter are at the same time connected in the sense of their specific common historical and cultural roots. They are united especially by their national identity with regard to political loyalty and membership in a united political community.

According to a number of Italian intellectuals, the Italian nation coincides with the foundation of the Italian Kingdom in 1861, as this date represents the beginning of Italian common history in the political sense[4] (Ruggiero 1997, 29; Spadolini 1994, 12). This includes the traditional influence of the ideas of the French revolution and especially of the enlightened Jacobin model (Komac 1995, 879–881). The constitution of the Italian state meant the political unity of the territory named Italy, but it did not solve the problem of Italian identity in the sense of sharing common values, mentality and fate. During the process of unification, cultural homogeneity and unity were imaginary, being used for political purposes in order to justify political unity (Bagnoli 2005, 43; Ruggiero 1997). Thus a gap was created between the newly formed civic unity and the existing ethnic nonuniformity of Italian social reality. This is perceivable even today; for example, in debates about the federal organization of the nation and in the political phenomenon of the Northern League, which originated from the crisis of the Italian identity as an "imaginary community" (Anderson 1998).

The thought and tradition of Italian identity on an ethnic basis, as defined by Italian culture and language, are still alive. From this point of view the Italian

people was already developing in the period between the 13th and the 14th centuries, when Dante Alighieri was writing in the vernacular Italian language. The high development of art and science then represented the common traits of different administrative-political units of the Italian peninsula (Spadolini 1994, 5). Rusconi (1993, 33) speaks about a cultural nation, because the different separated and independent political centres of power felt mutually connected by history and culture. This culture was expressed by foods, drinks, religious and magical beliefs, languages, dialects, popular habits and games (Ruggiero 1997).

Some data deriving from recent sociological studies, cited immediately below, show that the division between the socio-political and historical-cultural understanding of the Italian nationality is still topical. This becomes clear in the research of a group of intellectuals from Turin on the theme of Italian identity (Diamanti 1996a, 543; Nevola 1996, 526; Rusconi 1996, 512–515). In a question about the definition of the nation, ethnic and cultural contents prevail, including the priority of historical memory and language over socio-political content. A very low percentage of the people interviewed related the concept of nation to the political dimension in the sense of participation and respect of civic rules. When speaking about the pride of being Italian, the answers relate mainly to culture, art, and history. The negative elements that emerged are political life, political class, bad administration, criminality, corruption and a poor civic sense.

Similar contrasting views towards the Italian nation are reflected in a survey on the theme of national pride made in the 1990s (Diamanti & Segatti 1994, 17–22). The results suggest that pride regarding Italian nationality is very widespread, but overlaps with different territorial connections. Also in this study, the stereotype of Italianity arises as a component of ethnical elements: creativity in arts and economics; a typical attachment to the immediate land of origin, expressed in the family, town and local community; a capability of improvising, meaning that an Italian can manage any situation. This double attachment to the local (the city, the region) and to the Italian nation in the cultural sense and a poor appreciation of belonging to the public and state institutions, is confirmed as well in a similar survey realized in 2008 (Diamanti, 2009).

# 5. Ethnic Elements of Italian Nationality: the Italian Language and Dialects

The Italian language and dialects are the basis of the ethnic elements of Italian nationality. At the level of the Italian cultural nation the Italian language represents

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a connecting element between different local and regional cultural and linguistic contexts. The different dialects, which were spoken before Italian (which spread as the common language in the 20th century) embody the traditional cultural and linguistic diversity of the Italian peninsula.

Compared with other European realities, the relation between the development of the national language and the development of the national identity is complex. As Galli della Loggia (1998, 39–42) and Ruzza (2000, 170–173) observe, in Italy both processes developed in a more independent way than elsewhere in Europe. In France and Spain, for example, the national language grew as dominant language of the court, and spread through its use in state administration. In Italy the main language was generated particularly for cultural reasons and through the prestige of such authors as Dante, Petrarca and Boccaccio, who started to develop it in the 14th century on the basis of the Florentine dialect. However there were obstacles preventing the widespread development of this language. Latin had for centuries been the language of political and bureaucratic life. At the level of the Italian national identity language was therefore a secondary source of political identity.

In the 19th century there is no trace of a deep connection between national feelings and the Italian standard language. The process of the creation of a national state, national unification and national language was mainly led by élites[5] (Ruzza 2000, 172–173). The Risorgimento itself appeared as a middle-class revolution, launched mainly by economic factors (Cafagna 1990, 159). Moreover, the process of the unification of Italy was the result of diplomatic work and political consultation rather than the expression of the mobilization of the people from the bottom (Ferrarotti 2000, 219; Tullio-Altan 1995, 114, 1999, 145). The masses remained, therefore, isolated from events during the political unification and, as a consequence, from the standard language (Porciani 1993, 394).

The state based on the model of the nation coinciding with one language was not created through unification, as linguistic nonuniformity was very high (Lanaro 1999, 84). In 1861 only 2.5 per cent of Italians could speak Dante's Italian language and the level of literacy was only 20 per cent (De Mauro 2005, 37; Vigo 1993, 39). During the period of unification the standard Italian language was spoken mainly by the members of the literate classes in the various regions, who could develop their mutual national sympathetic feelings through language (De Mauro 2005, 53). For this reason the Italian language – as opposed to the typical situation, when language is one of the most important elements of national identity – in this case was not a factor that could create among the general

population a feeling of belonging to the new state (Ruzza 2000, 168). The liberal governments of the time did implement the linguistic policy in the spirit of romanticism, stating that everyone should learn Dante's Italian. Nevertheless, as this was forced on people from above, it was ineffective (Lanaro 1999, 84).

The standard Italian language gained ground in the 20th century, when literacy spread and the use of the media developed at the same time (Ruzza 2000, 168). The standard language broke through during the period of fascism (Clark 1984, 244). Propaganda, films, radio and compulsory elementary education enabled the introduction of a standard language in the country and among the poorer people in the towns. The stress on the meaning of nation, history and authority in the framework of the fascist ideology increased the prestige of the language as a means of communication (Ruzza 2000, 174–175). After the fall of fascism the nationalistic ideas lost their relevance and the Italian language was no longer a tool that could shape Italians.

After the war, additional social factors arose, contributing to the progressive enforcement of the Italian standard language at a broader level. Internal migration and the consequent urbanization connected to industrialization in the 1950s were important elements supporting the gradual abandonment of the use of dialects (De Mauro 1991). Because of the needs of the market economy, people from the south began migrating to northern areas that were witnessing industrial development and therefore in need of a workforce (Ruzza 2000, 175). This economic process required an adequate level of linguistic homogeneity enabling communication at the workplace and in the marketplace.

Meanwhile, access to education became easier and, together with the bureaucracy of the public services and compulsory service in the Army, enhanced language unification (De Mauro 1991). At the same time television suddenly emerged as a force for linguistic propagation. This medium allowed contact with the standard Italian language to less educated and poor people as well as to those living outside urban areas. In 1958, 77 per cent of Italian families listened to radio and watched TV either at home or in public (De Mauro 1991; Ventrone 1998, 374–375). This represented a social revolution connected to the new "American way of life" based on consumerist behaviour imported from the United States together with the post war reconstruction programme (Scoppola 1997, 317).

Thus, a new form of standard Italian became the dominant colloquial language with a prestige and a meaning that had not been present in the past (Ruzza 2000, 175–182). Nevertheless, the dialects are still today the basic means of communication used by much of the population. We can observe a form of

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diglossia, wherein the speakers switch from the standard language to the local dialect and back, depending on the various speaking situations (Ruzza 2000, 170–176). Indeed, Italy is very rich in dialects. Their variants differ considerably (the speakers of the dialects of the north cannot understand the speakers from the south). The dialects and regional identities were preserved in part because of incomplete social modernization after the war, which resulted in part of the population keeping local and regional identities rather than developing an Italian national identity (Bollati 1983; Galli della Loggia 1998; Rusconi 1993; Ruzza 2000).

In the 1990s regional belonging regained social prestige. The level of the vitality of regional dialects was indeed very low, but in some regions they began to be asserted in local cultural associations and schools. A legal basis for regional laws was created and allowed and supported the conservation of dialects and regional and/or local identities[6] (Palici di Suni Prat 2002, 102–106; Stolfo 2009, 178–179). Moreover, the safeguarding of cultural heritage at the regional and local level resulted in the consolidation of the political roles of the regions, not to mention tourist promotion and economic growth.

In Italy the issue of safeguarding local dialects is also connected to the problem of safeguarding national and language minorities. Indeed, there are several examples of local dialects that are almost independent languages (for example the Venetian and the Sicilian dialects), and are safeguarded at a regional level. At the same time some legally recognized regional languages are still perceived as dialects by the public or do not have the social prestige that would grant them the socio-linguistic status of a language (for example, the Friulian and Sardinian languages). This situation is dynamic, as the processes of revitalization of different local dialects remains ongoing, opening new opportunities for their development in the sense of the formation of new regional languages. Nevertheless, there is also the risk that the legislation which is dedicated to linguistic minorities, could be debased to a lower level, as it is equated with interventions in favour of the safeguarding of dialects and local folklore (Palici di Suni Prat 2002, 102–106).

It is no accident, then, that the Italian state after the war avoided not only the issue of the settlement of the legal status of national minorities, but also the claims of safeguarding and protecting local dialects. The complicated relation between the minority issue and that of dialect was clear during the votes with respect to law 482/1999. The latter provoked sharp reactions among some intellectual and political groups, which claimed that some languages included in the law were dialects – for example, the Friulian and the Sardinian languages (Cisilino 2004 120; Palici di Suni Prat 2000, 104, 2002, 106–110). From this point of

view they believed that the law was therefore restrictive, as it would not take into account the real language and dialect varieties of Italy and of its regions (Brezigar 1999, 310). Criticism also regarded the case of excluded dialects which should be considered on the level of languages - for example, the dialects of Veneto, Piedmont and Lombardy.

# 6. Italian National Identity under the Influence of Socio-Political Fragmentation

The concept of the Italian nation developed from the very beginning on a territory characterized by typical socio-political fragmentation. Occurrent gaps mainly involve the different political-administrative and socio-cultural models, which were formed in an independent way and coexisted until the unification of the Italian nation in 1861. Some models are still visible today and they continue to influence the socio-political activities in Italy.

This long period of fifteen centuries of political fragmentation in Italy is defined by Galli della Loggia (1998, 59–61) with the term "a thousand Italies". The Italian state was born after the political and social process of the unification of smaller independent units on the Italian peninsula before 1861 which had their own history – the Kingdom of Naples and Sicily, the Kingdom of Sardinia, the Papal state, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, the Austrian territories, etc. (Spadolini 1994, 5). We observe three historical periods that marked the internal political and cultural fragmentation. The invasion of the Longobards in the 6th century separated the Italian peninsula into Germanic and Byzantine parts (Lanaro 1999, 95). During the Middle Ages a typical political separation saw the presence of opposed nation-towns and of the Papal state, which was connected to strong foreign powers (Ruzza 2000, 172). The period at the end of the 15th century is important, as on the Italian peninsula various wars were conducted against foreign armies. In this period the idea of Italian freedom in the sense of independence from foreign supremacy, of the balance between various local dukes and in the sense of a political union in the form of a federation, began developing.

The social dividing lines which derived from the political inheritance of the Italian peninsula remained strongly rooted during the Risorgimento (Banti 2000, 201–202), and was linked to the various political-military units that existed before unification. It survived despite the strong symbolic apparatus of the newly born Italian national state (Rusconi 1993, 33).

*50*  During the process of unification of Italy and during the first decades of the existence of the state a new crucial factor appeared, marking the socio-political fragmentation of the Italian nation, namely the competitive relations between the Church and the newly born state (Banti 2000, 201–202; Lanaro 1999, 87–88). The ecclesiastical hierarchies in the Vatican were usually hostile towards the lay Italian government and towards the process of unification, and therefore did not legitimize the new state (Galli della Loggia 1998, 157; Di Porto 2003, 30; Nani 2006, 218–219). Therefore, in Rome there were two authorities, both presenting themselves as Italian and Universal. An issue arose regarding which of the two powers had the right to national loyalty. It is difficult to estimate how much damage was caused on the institutional level by this situation. In any case the preserve of the Church had a negative influence on public opinion as the population was at the end of the 19th century completely Catholic.

A typical example of the historical socio-political fragmentation of the Italian nation that is strongly present even today, is the separation between the north and the south (Galli della Loggia 1998; Lepre 1994; Nani 2006; Ruzza 2000). In his analysis of the racist ideas and stereotypes in Italy at the end of the 19th century, Nani (2006, 101–103) observes that the idea of the duality of Italy was already strongly rooted within the intellectual tradition. It was founded on negative and lasting stereotypes of the different and inferior Italian south as opposed to the north. These stereotypes developed in the framework of the process of the unification of Italy, when two very different administrative-political units were united – the Kingdom of Piedmont and Sardinia and the Kingdom of the two Sicilies. The former developed a constitutional tradition and led the process of unification. In the latter authoritarian models prevailed because of the influence of feudalism, of which the subordination to the central power and the loyalty to dynasties was typical (Galli della Loggia 1998, 64–70). There was no rooted tradition of municipalism and of the independent government of towns; this tradition was, on the contrary, the basis of the political arrangement of the Italian north and centre. Moreover, the role of the south during the unification was controversial. On the one hand the local élites supported the creation of Italy, but on the other hand some were also oriented toward autonomy. A rebellion of the local population known as *brigantaggio* also spread, especially in Sicily (Romeo 1973, 370).

Similarly, Ruzza (2000, 174) notes that the unification of Italy was the result of the agreements and compromises between the political élites of the time in Piedmont and the aristocratic élites in southern Italy. The northern industrial élites gained a new market for their goods in exchange for legitimating the aristocratic élites in the south. This separation stimulated the development of the

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entrepreneurial culture in the north and of the state assisted political élites in the south, and this caused long term cultural and political differences that are still evident today.

The socio-political fragmentation of Italy was not solved by the political unification in the 19th century or by the later development of the Italian nation in the fascist and, then, the democratic form of state (Banti 2000; Di Porto 2003; Galli della Loggia 1998; Lanaro 1999; Lepre 1994; Nani 2006; Rusconi 1993, 1994; Ruzza 2000; Spadolini 1994; Tullio-Altan 1995). It was simply removed both from political attention and from collective historical memory. For this reason ethnic identity as a symbolic form, which gives to its members the motivation for an active and satisfactory participation in the name of common values and a collective life, did not develop (Tullio-Altan 1995, 103).

A distinctive expression of the socio-political discordances within the Italian state is the phenomenon of the Northern league. This political movement is the index of the modern crisis of the Italian nation in civic and ethnic terms. Indeed, it works at the level of the construction of ethnic identities, which drive away the traditional Italian identity. Both Italy and the united political national concept are questioned.

According to Diamanti (1996, 7–12), the Northern league is a prism of different views of the wider Italian social, cultural, economic and political crisis. He ascribes to it the role of a laboratory that expresses some key issues of the modern Italian national state, such as the alienation of the citizens from state institutions, the weakness of social and territorial solidarity, the crisis of mass parties and of general political participation and the ineffectiveness of democracy. It is also the expression of the lack of transfer of the national culture and the historical memory of the Italian nation, which were not conveyed by schools, intellectuals or the media (Rusconi 1993, 35). But it is most of all the reflection of the crisis of the Italian north, where in the last twenty years specific areas developed economically and socially, but at the same time remained marginal at the level of political power compared to larger industrial centres (Diamanti 1996, 12–13). In accordance with the European region-oriented parties it offers a new interpretation of political citizenship at a regional or local basis (Rusconi 1993, 11). In this sense its nature and programme are markedly anti-state (Giordano 2000, 468).

The phenomenon of the Northern League has to be considered in the framework of the dissolution between 1991 and 1993 of the post-war party system based on the predominance of the Christian Democratic Party and its government

with the socialist and communist parties (Scoppola 1997, 449–539). A popular referendum in 1993 confirmed the change of the electoral system from a proportional and centre-oriented political system to a majoritarian one. Besides that, the Clean Hands (*Mani pulite*) investigation of the relations between various criminal mafia organizations and the leading political parties illuminated a profound institutional and moral crisis in the Italian political system. Moreover, the end of the Cold War's bipolar political and ideological division provoked a crisis in the Italian communist party and the opposition between the USA-oriented Christian Democrats and the Soviet Union-oriented Communist party no longer made sense. Consequently, the process began of constructing a new Italian left ideology with its own party and the Christian Democrat party witnessed its own demise. At the same time, this opened up space for new forms of political expressions, such as the Northern League and Berlusconi's right-wing party.

## 7. Conclusions

This overview shows that the understanding of Italian nationality in the last twenty years changed in such a way that greater attention to ethnic elements of regional identities and the revitalization of dialects makes sense. Moreover, new political powers, based on a regional logic, developed, and are embodied in the party of the Northern League. This led to the crisis of the Italian nation in the civic sense as a state-political unit which was already displaying internal breaches because of the different administrative-political history of its territories. At the same time a revival of patriotism took place. All this elements generated a debate about Italian nationality and the role of the Italian state in contemporary society and thus an intellectual democratic space where the national minority issue could be included and discussed.

In other words, a network of socio-political elements and cultural-ideological guidelines prevailed, so that the theme of national minorities could become an element of the current political discourse in Italy within a general new discussion of the issue of ethnic and civil views on Italian nationality. Thus, the research argument, namely that the concept of the Italian nation is a factor which influences the level of political attention towards the issue of the national minorities in Italy, appears confirmed.

# Notes

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[1] The term "historical linguistic minorities" is cited in article 6 of the Italian Constitution and in the national legislation for the safeguard of national minorities (Laws 482/1999 and 38/2001).

[2] Article 1 of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages states that dialects and languages of migrants are not considered regional or minority languages.

[3] The Italian state is divided in 20 regions and each has a statute that regulates its activity and administration. Five of them (Sicily, Sardinia, Trentino Alto Adige which includes the autonomous provinces of Bolzano and Trento, Valle d'Aosta and Friuli Venezia Giulia) have special statutes due to economic needs, the presence of national minorities as well as their political and geographical position (borderlands or islands). These special statutes contain specific norms concerning autonomy on the administrative, financial and legal levels. The statutes of the Province of Bolzano and of the Region Valle d'Aosta have special provisions due to the presence of national minorities.

[4] This thesis was developed most significantly by Benedetto Croce (1866-1952), one of the leading Italian liberal intellectuals, philosophers and historians who left their mark on Italian thought at the end of the 19th and in the first decades of the 20th century (Dizionario 1985, 181-205).

[5] Among the Italian analyses of the Risorgimento, there are some, for example Banti (2000), Banti & Ginsborg (2000), Banti & Bizzocchi (2002), which oppose the theory about the Risorgimento as a phenomenon limited to the élites. They support the idea of this movement being a mass phenomenon.

[6] The Emilia Romagna and Lazio regions approved regional laws for safeguarding local dialects and of the literary heritage written in dialect and for initiatives in research, education and the media (Palici di Suni Prat 2002, 102–106). The regional laws for safeguarding the dialects were also introduced by Sicily, Piedmont, Liguria and Veneto (Colussi 2009). The contents of these laws were connected to the problem of migrations from the various Italian regions in the world before and after the war, and to modern politics regarding the return of their descendants and for the conservation of links with the communities abroad. The Veneto and Marche regions, for example, started to lend financial support to cultural initiatives and activities for the preserving and safeguarding the identity of their emigrants throughout the world, for the consolidation of cultural relations with them and the economic and social inclusion of those migrants who were returning to Italy (Palici di Suni Prat 2002, 102–106).

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