**ITALIAN POLITICAL CULTURE FROM 1989 ONWARDS[[1]](#footnote-1):**

**IDEA, MEMORY AND PRACTICE OF DEMOCRACY TODAY**

*“Peripli. Culture e Società Euromediterranee”*

*P.za San Francesco, 5*

*06023 Gualdo Tadino (PG), Italy*

*info@peripli.org*

***Abstract***

This paper concerns the analysis of ‘Italian political culture from 1989 onwards’ prepared by Peripli association in the framework of the project ‘Youth involvement in a constructive dialogue: Communist Past in Contemporary Western Balkan’ (YOU-WB), funded by the Europe for Citizen Program of the European Union”.

The focus of the research is to examine the main stages of the construction of Italian democracy (from II World War to 1989) and its difficulties from 1989 to the first twenty years of the 21st century, when the political and institutional changes disrupt the Italian political class up to the transformation of party system and political communication of today.

The main objective of the project is to consider the democracy both as a common memory to share with youth and an idea/practice that need to be implemented and nurtured continuously for assuring its integrity and its evolution.

***Keywords: democracy, populism, collective memory, parties, social and economic transformation***

***Introduction. Italy’s path toward democracy***

The conquest of democracy in Italy took place after World War II and affirmed itself over the twenty years of fascist dictatorship through the partisan struggle in which all the political and civil forces in opposition to that dictatorship participated, organizing the Resistance to fascism clandestinely.

The Italian communists of that time, who founded in the 1921 the most important Communist Party in the Western world, were banned and persecuted during the twenty years of fascism, but they made a decisive contribution to the success of that struggle, together withthe groups of Catholics of the Popular Party, the liberal secularists, thesocialists and the Action Party, all political forces reduced to hiding and persecuted during the fascism.

It was a very significant moment in Italian contemporary history, which highlighted the importance of the cultural roots of the groups in action, but also of the civilians, of the people, of all those who miraculously emerged from twenty years of denial of individual and collective freedoms, from a culture of hatred and death, from the nightmare of the racial laws wanted by the regime with the consequent extermination of the Jews and not only, from the barbarism of a devastating war, which had destroyed Italy and weakened the soul of the Italians .

All the political forces of the victorious Resistance, following the institutional referendum of 1946 in favour of the Republic, then merged into the Constituent Assembly which produced the constitutional charter which went into effect on January 1, 1948 and which is still in force today. The Italian Constitution affirms the fundamental values of democracy and dictates the rules of civil coexistence inspired by a strong intertwining between the concepts and rights of freedom and equality.

The enactment of the constitutional law sanctioned the birth of the Italian Republic and its form of a representative democracy, articulated in institutions such as mass parties and characterized by universal suffrage extended to all the citizens of the Republic.

***The Big Clash: 1989***

Without those cultural roots, would it have been possible to free oneself from the fascist yoke and give life to a democratic path based on the republican constitution and to face the challenges of the post-1989 world?

These basic questions have guided our research and the training of our youth in the contemporary phase of Italian democracy by now adult, but perhaps still not very mature and full of contradictions, of residues of the fascist mentality visible in various forms of populism, of infiltration organized crime in the meshes of the democratic state, of internal terrorism, political corruption, of attempts to manipulate public opinion, etc., in short, of continuous verydangerous attacks on the maintenance of democracy and which marked the years following its affirmation.

1989 represents a turning point for Italian political culture and democracy. From 1989 onwards, with the real and symbolic fall of the Berlin Wall, many of those contradictions were highlighted and Italy has lived and is experiencing now a different cultural phase. It was a profound change in history. From this moment on, Italian political culture is characterized by profound changes that mark the various stages of a path, often troubled, that leads to the evolution of the great mass parties, the attempt to participate actively in the construction of political Europe.

The reflection on what has happened in Italy in the last 30 years is essential for the defence of a democratic process that must continue in the transformations and cultural changes, inside and outside Italy: as, for instance, the affirmation of the European Union, of which Italy was co-founder with Altiero Spinelli's Ventotene Manifesto, the globalization and the important economic developments, the era of digital communication, the insertion of Italy in a context that must take into account above all the evolution of the European Union, of what is happening in the Balkan region and more generally in the Mediterranean region.

***Memory and action: Peripli approach***

In the middle of the abrupt changes of today, the historical memory of the difficult construction of our democracy and the care it requires, must not be forgotten. We must keep in mind the cultural changes in which we must act, the defence of human rights and individual and collective freedoms, the promotion of equality of citizens not only before the law, but in the equity determined by the better distribution of wealth, solidarity towards peoples devastated by wars, conflicts, climate change, thoughtless exploitation of nature and its resources, epidemics, etc., for which we are all responsible. All this must be kept in mind, not in the abstraction of good intentions, but in the concreteness of politics and cultural actions aimed at spreading ideas, reflections and the production of tools necessary to support the democracy of our time.

Our project considers the involvement of youth people crucial in terms of historical memory and cultural diffusion. Our Association has taken this opportunity to intensify a training course on the proposed themes intended for high school and university students, some of whom participate with their ideas and reflections in our meeting as protagonists, as well as an attentive and participatory public.

The 3 day workshop organized by Peripli received also the expertise of well-known Italian specialists in the political science sector, such as prof. Paolo Mancini, in that of the history ofpolitical ideas, like Dr. Rosa Fioravante, and in that of digital challenges for Italian political parties, like prof. Antonio Tursi; the testimony of the journalist Marina Lalovic, an immigrant from Belgrade, was also used.

The collaboration of some members of Peripli was essential. They contributed to the training of young people during the course of the project itself, as well as participating in the workshop with interventions in accordance with their skills.

It was also used the output obtained from the training of the young people involved in the project, which produced a series of in-depth information papers, on the transformation of mass parties, after 1989, in particular of the Italian Communist Party and of the Christian Democrats; on the essential and historical stages of the path of our democracy; on the involvement of civil society in the defence of democratic processes, etc.

The comparison with the other realities of the countries involved in the project, through the meetings already organized by Albania, North Macedonia and France, has fascinated our young people and it was an opportunity for comparative reflection between the history of Italy and that of these countries.

The workshop ended with a final interactive debate on the subject: "What action can we take to initiate a process of change?" The most shared theme among the participants is to create a new political class that can be formed in function of sustainable, fair and inclusive development. In particular, young people have focused their interventions on the importance of caring for the environment.

Finally, it emerged that the ultimate goal of future generations must be to reduce inequalities. The need for a framework that can function without any kind of discrimination was stressed. A world where every person, regardless of race, gender, sexual or political orientation, can have an opportunity.

***Conclusions. Democracy vs Closed society***

Democracy is a process that is carried out continuously, involving societies as a whole, but it is also a value to be pursued on the basis of the history of each country, it is not a format that can be fully exported, but a constant civil work supported by memory, culture, confrontation, dialogue, which must be translated into ethics and also political commitment. Recourse to the electoral call is a fundamental element, but not sufficient to guarantee the complexity of the democratic form.

The path toward democracy has not finished with the end of II World War or in 1989. It is a never-ending collective struggle that it involves nowadays the framework of the European Union, where the contribution of each country is strategic for building an effective intercultural democratic society in Europe and for shaping a renewed authentic relationship between Europe and the Mediterranean Region.

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 *Workshop’s Speeches by Italian specialists:*

1. Prof. Paolo Mancini’s speech on the theme "Tribulation, Volatility and Polarization: Italian culture since 1989"
2. Dr Rosa Fioravante’s speech on the theme "Democracy as ideology: from the fall of the Berlin Wall to the fall of liberalism"
3. Prof. Antonio Tursi’s speech on the theme "Parties in the digital challenge: between participation and participationism"
4. Testimony of the journalist Dr. Martina Lalovic on the issue of identity and large emigration from the Balkan region
1. “This paper is "The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein." [↑](#footnote-ref-1)