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Immigration, Public Opinion, and the Italian Political System

by *Nicola Pasini*

Once again in 2011 the immigration issue occupied a central position in the Italian political system. Even in a year in which economic questions captured much of the attention of the principal actors (the institutions, political parties, media and public opinion), this issue managed to remain a constant presence on the public agenda. It should not of course be excluded that the economic crisis and the concerns linked to it, though not completely overshadowing immigration, may have contributed to changing in part its significance, reshaping the definition of the problem in the eyes of the actors.

The present chapter of the Report, divided into two parts, intends to explore the dynamics that immigration has triggered inside the political system, in other words to investigate how it was perceived and handled over the course of 2011. First, we will examine some data and interpretations of the orientations of public opinion. Secondly, we will analyse the policy offerings that political parties formulated in response to the questions posed by public opinion. To this purpose, we will examine the principal electoral programmes presented in May for the local elections of four major cities. Third, we will analyse the black box, that is the decision-making process of the political system, not so much to highlight its working mechanisms, but rather to investigate what (and especially how much) was produced over the period of time under consideration. We will look at the legislative production of the central government and several Italian Regions in order to assess the importance of the migration question in relation to the policies produced.

In the second part, the goal is to show the political system in a dynamic dimension, by reconstructing the decision-making processes, the positions of the actors over time, their preferences, and the interests in play regarding three significant facts of 2011:

1) the arrival of thousands of people from North Africa on the coasts of the island of Lampedusa, and the war in Libya. The attention of public opinion, the

media and policy makers was focused for many weeks on these events, due to several aspects of an exceptional character. The war in Libya, while technically a matter of foreign policy, had implications in terms of the migration flows from the war (cf. cap. 4.1);

2) the approval of the decree for the repatriation of the illegals, which took place in mid-June;

3) the approval, by a Commission of the Chamber of Deputies, of a ban on wearing garments that cover the face (burqas and the like).

7.1   Part one: Public Opinion, Local Elections, Black Box

7.1.1 Public Opinion

The issues perceived as being the most pressing by European public opinion in 2011 were economy and immigration. These are the main results of a study done by the Eurobarometer (Eurobarometer, 2011a). The report *Public opinion in European Union* attempted to shed light on the greatest concerns of European citizens, their priorities, and the policy sectors that they would like to see handled with urgency by public institutions. The results of this survey confirm trends underway along with highlighting the existence of several important undercurrents.

In particular, to the question "What are the two most important questions that must be dealt with by the EU, by your country, by you personally?" the responses were as follows:

Table 7.1 The issues that must be dealt with by the EU, by their country and by themselves according to European citizens.

	EU	Own country	Themselves
Economic situation	43	33	22
Unemployment	23	42	19
State of public and private finances	22	14	5
Immigration	20	12	4
Inflation	17	27	46
Terrorism	13	6	2

Source: Eurobarometer, 2011a: 24

Concerns over the economic situation are foremost among the thoughts of Europeans, but while questions of economic development should preferably be dealt with by the EU, unemployment is deemed to be a matter for national governments. The state of finances is a European matter, whereas inflation is a problem that must be dealt with principally by European citizens themselves. Immigration is more of a priority for the EU than for national governments. On the other hand, the Italian data on immigration differ substantially from the European average. In Italy, immigration is perceived by 24% of the interviewees as the main problem

to be dealt with on the national scale (+11% compared to the analogous question asked in February 2009), while for 27% it is a priority for the European agenda. A possible interpretation of these changes in public opinion is represented by the events that happened on the island of Lampedusa.

The centrality of the immigration issue for European citizens emerges with greater vigour when they are asked "on which policy area should the European Union concentrate?": 36% of Europeans respond "economic and monetary policy" but 33% indicate "migration policies". These data are even more intense in several countries, including Italy: our country is one of the six in which migration is the policy area on which the European Union should concentrate urgently, more so even than on economic questions.

Table 7.2 Countries in which immigration is the most urgent problem for the EU and variation as of autumn 2010.

Country	V.%	Variation
Austria	49	-3
Belgium	41	-4
Italy	41	5
Luxembourg	44	13
Malta	49	13
The UK	42	-2

Source: Eurobarometer, 2011a: 24

Austria, the UK, and Belgium belong to this group of countries for which the percentage is important though in decline compared to 2010. By contrast, in three other countries (Italy, Luxembourg, and Malta) the percentage is markedly growing. In the case of Italy and Malta, the Lampedusa landings undoubtedly impacted the situation considerably.

The perception of public opinion about how the EU budget is spent (and how it should be spent) is another important aspect of the questions that are brought to the attention of the black box. The data from the Eurobarometer (Eurobarometer, 2011b) show that European citizens think that largest part of the budget is spent on administrative and bureaucratic costs (32%), for aid to aspiring member countries (27%), for defence and security and for economic development. Just 12% (+4% compared to autumn 2008) think that a large portion of the EU budget is spent on migration policies. The highest percentage of this response (immigration) is recorded in Italy (23%) followed by Cyprus (21%). To the questions "in which sector would you like the majority of the EU budget to be spent?" the responses were: the welfare state and employment 42%, economic development 40%, education 39%, healthcare 37%, immigration 12%. The centrality of the immigration issue in Italian public opinion is also confirmed by the data from the survey conducted in April 2011 by the CISE Political Observatory and published in the *Sole 24 Ore*. The immigration issue remains a constant concern of Italians. It is third in order of importance. To the question: "According to you, what is the

most important problem that the government must deal with in Italy?" 54.9% of the interviewees responded "jobs", 9.5% "economic development" and 8.5% "immigration". Less frequent were responses such as "political functioning" (6.8%) and "justice and legality" (3.9%). After economic questions, also for these statistics, immigration is the main concern of Italians.

With regards instead to capacity of the political system to provide solutions to the priorities, several clear indications emerge regarding the immigration issue. The responses of Italian interviewees to the question "who would be most capable of handling this problem?" are reported in Table 7.3.

Table 7.3 Perception of the ability of the political system to resolve problems. Figures in percentages.

	Jobs	Economic development	Immigration
A coalition of the centre-right	13.17	24.62	29.57
A coalition of the centre-left	24.46	16.55	7.91
Both	17.11	14.68	26.97
None	43.78	40.66	33.41
Other	1.48	3.49	2.14

Source: CISE Political Observatory, 2011

Only a small number of interviewees indicated the centre-left as a group of parties capable of handling immigration issues. The part of the interviewees that recognised in the centre-right this capacity is higher (around one third). The portion of interviewees that considers politics as being overall incapable of handling the immigration problem is lower (even though it is still one third of the total, the most frequent response), compared to the other two issues (work and economic development). Greater trust emerges in the political system in handling this issue, perhaps because they believe that the issue is more governable by public institutions in comparison to questions of an economic character. This trust is however also very unbalanced between the two coalitions, a sign that on this issue the policy offering of the centre-right is more credible than that of the centre-left.

Other data show how the opinions of Italians offer particular nuances that at first sight appear contradictory. In response to the statement "Legal immigrants who pay taxes should be able to vote in the elections for the mayor of the municipality in which they live", 39.52% of interviewees say that they are "very much in agreement", 36.89% that they are "somewhat in agreement", 9.94% that they are "not very much in agreement" and 13.65% that they are "not at all in agreement". In response instead to the statement "it is right to allow Muslims to build mosques in Italy", 11.32% of interviewees say that they are "very much in agreement", 27.1% that they are "somewhat in agreement", 21.2% say that they are "not very much in agreement", while 40.38% respond that they are "not at all in agreement".

It is as though two feelings existed side by side: the desire for integration on one hand and the distrust of the "different" on the other hand. They are feelings that appear to be contradictory, but perhaps this is not so: they are a sign of anxiety, but also of the wish to overcome it (Il Sole24Ore 2011: 12).

In the process of forming policy demands, the media play a fundamental role: both in terms of the choice to cover (or not to cover) certain issues, as well as the space given to each of these and the nuances that are emphasised. In Italy[1], in the first four months of 2011, the immigration issue (residual in 2010) had an attention equal to 6% (compared to an average 2% in the other countries). "This statistic can be traced to a single event: the landings of immigrants on Lampedusa and on the coasts of Southern Italy" (European Observatory on Security, 2011: 3).

In general on European news stations immigration is not depicted with anxiety, whereas in Italy it occupies the agenda with 122 "alarmist" reports, or 13.9% of the total (the European average is 3.2%).

And this is the second significant difference from European news networks: the representation of migration flows (a consequence of the revolts in the Arab world and of the Libyan conflict) as "an unprecedented emergency of arrivals" (ibid.: 4).

In 2011 a clash arose between the social perception and media representation of immigration.

If the attention given to the migration flows, as a factor of insecurity, increased visibly in the last year, especially with regards to the emergency of the landings on the coasts of the South, this does not seem to have affected the salience attributed to it by public opinion (ibid.: 7).

Table 7.4 Percentage of interviewees who indicate immigration as the most serious problem that must be dealt with.

Year	V.%
2005	11.8
2006	11.9
2007	13.3
2008	10.8
March 2009	10.4
May 2009	9.7
June 2010	3.6
September 2010	9.1
May 2011	6.3

Source: European Security Observatory, 2011

[1] The aforementioned study analysed, in addition to Italy, also France, Germany, Great Britain and Spain.

The fears linked to the foreign presence appear, therefore, more contained than in the past. Like for petty crime, so too for immigration the highest figure was observed in 2007:

The two issues, moreover, have always shown a close association in the opinions (and in the fears) of citizens. Today a mere 6% of interviewees cite immigration as the main problem, while in previous years this number had passed 10% (with a peak of 13% in 2007). The issue is in the sixth position in the rankings, behind inflation (9%) and environmental deterioration (8%) (ibid.: 7).

In the same study:

Slightly less than one-third of those interviewed considered foreigners to be a *threat to employment* (32%). It is perhaps possible that the continuing difficulties of our economy have weakened one of the factors that in the past had favoured the acceptance of new arrivals: the idea that the foreign workforce represented a resource for the production system. The percentage of people who see immigrants as an economic resource is today at an historic low (40%), whereas in previous surveys it surpassed, even by a considerable margin, the threshold of an absolute majority (60% in a study from 2003) (ibid.: 7).

The feelings of greater anxiety feed above all into the constituency of the centre-right, and, more specifically, of the Northern League (*Lega Nord*): 49% of people who vote for this party fear that those who try their luck in our country can make the search for (or retention of) a job more complicated. Among voters for the *Popolo della Libertà* ("The People of Freedom", PdL) this opinion is held by 44% of interviewees. The territorial distribution of this a statistic does not provide any big surprises:

It is the citizens living in the South (37%) that most fear the repercussions of migration flows on employment. With regards to socio-demographic traits, this concern seems to be found in particular in the less educated (38%), in residents of small municipalities (36% in centres of fewer than 30 thousand inhabitants), labourers (43%), in addition to the unemployed (47%) (ibid.: 8).

Public opinion has, therefore, been strongly influenced by the landings on Lampedusa, even though this event has not reversed the trend of the diminishing intensity of immigration among the most urgent problems to be dealt with.

7.1.2 The 2011 local elections: the policy proposals in the electoral programmes

The political platform is made evident during election campaigns, when parties, coalitions and candidates formulate proposals to win over voters. In 2011 local elections took place in many Italian municipalities; among these, mayors were elected in Italy's four principal cities after Rome: Milan, Naples, Turin and Bologna.

Our examination of the electoral programmes of the coalitions that competed in May 2011 has the goal of identifying the type of policy proposals produced on immigration that, along with the economic crisis, remains one of the issues that is a source of great concern among Italians.

In Milan, running for mayor of the city were Giuliano Pisapia (centre-left) and Letizia Moratti (centre-right). In the electoral programme of the former, for Milan in 2011-2016, there was the desire to create a city "in which no one feels like a foreigner". In the more "operative" part of the electoral programme several guidelines for action emerge:

1) control of "illegal labour" is the most effective instrument for governing illegal immigration;
2) fundamental rights (right to a quality of life, to labour, to health, to a home, to education, to freedom of worship, to their own culture, to security) must be recognised to all citizens, those of Italian origin and those of other nationalities;
3) the experiment of via Padova is configured as a laboratory for integration;
4) the realisation of large centre of Islamic culture that includes, in addition to the mosque, spaces for meetings and gatherings, that can be not only the exercise of a right, but also a great cultural opportunity for Milan[2].

In the electoral programme of Letizia Moratti the part regarding immigration insists on: "reception in legality". Three lines of action are identified specifically:

1) favouring the integration of legal immigrants, by activating an integrated network of services for learning Italian, work orientation, support for self-entrepreneurship and business creation, information on access to public funds and to microcredit;
2) promotion of cultural initiatives of international communities present in Milan;
3) definition of an instrument for involving and consulting foreign communities[3].

In the Piedmont capital the election was between Piero Fassino (centre-left) and Michele Coppola (centre-right). Fassino's programme was very concise in general, including its treatment of immigration. The issue was inserted in the chapter "Turin, capital of security" and not in the chapter entitled "Turin, capital of fraternity", which in of itself indicates a precise definition of the issue. Among the proposals: integration for legal foreign citizens who respect the rules and love the

[2] Cf. www.pisapiaxmilano.com.
[3] Cf. www.letiziamoratti.it.

city in which they live, promotion of projects for coexistence (school, home, places of worship)[4]. With regards instead to Coppola's programme, the general logic behind the proposals is enclosed in the following phrase: "yes to legality and yes to quality of life. In a context of legality and respect for rules, security and social cohesion must become for the new administration the principal objective in every context: in schools, in factories, in offices, in the streets". Some proposals about legality and multi-ethnic integration follow[5].

In Bologna the race was between Virginio Merola (centre-left) and Manes Bernardini (centre-right). In the electoral programme of the centre-left the immigration issue is given a lot of space. It is included in the chapter "A Bologna of innovation and rights" that contains the goal of constructing a city of dialogue and encounter. There are five actions identified:

1) building together with immigrants real opportunities of integration and new policies for intercultural cities, also by re-launching the councils of foreign citizens in neighbourhoods;

2) promoting the learning the Italian language for migrant children and their families;

3) supporting intercultural dialogue and combatting discrimination and racism;

4) promoting information and orientation about the rights and duties of foreigners by creating synergies between URP (Office for Public Relations), welfare offices and healthcare services;

5) promoting the city's role in organising non-violent thinking for resolving conflicts, in the promotion of concrete actions to prevent them, such as a place to hold meetings that initiate diplomatic actions and dialogue between the various parties involved[6].

The programme of the centre-right candidate, Bernardini, a member of the Northern League, was diametrically opposite. The issue was handled concisely and unambiguously in various parts of the programme document. In the chapter "Bologna, Finally Safe" there is a call to struggle against illegal immigration. In the part dedicated in the allocation of low-cost housing it proposes the concept: "*Bolognesi* First", through criteria linked to the length of residence. The same concept is reasserted in the chapter on the Bolognese social system, where the need for introducing criteria linked to residence is mentioned not only for social policies, but also for the incentives for entrepreneurial activities[7].

In Naples' elections immigration did not seem to be among the most important issues of the race, at least that is the impression one gets from reading the electoral programmes of the two principal candidates: Luigi De Magistris (centre-

[4] Cf. www.pierofassinosindaco.it.
[5] Cf. www.michelecoppola.it.
[6] Cf. http://virginiomerola.it.
[7] Cf. www.manesbernardini.it.

left) and Gianni Lettieri (centre-right). In the former's electoral programme, the immigration issue is completely absent[8]. In that of the latter it is outlined rather eccentrically compared to the other three cities examined in this analysis. There are two proposals: the first is a plan for the creation of *ad hoc* spaces for local ethnic markets and travelling salespeople, the second is the creation of municipality offices that offer language courses and collect announcements for jobs and houses to rent for immigrants, in close collaboration with associations[9].

Immigration, Naples aside, was central to the parties' political platforms in the local elections. In those of Milan, more space was dedicated to it in Pisapia's programme. In terms of content the differences between the two coalitions were quite clear: on one side (the centre-left), the most frequent word was "integration"; on the other (the centre-right) the term most used was "legality". In the Turin elections the outline, from the point of view of the content of the proposals, seems to be rather similar. Integration and legality were the two watchwords put into juxtaposition with one another. In the Bolognese elections, instead, while the watchword of the centre-left was "integration", that of the centre-right was "*Bolognesi* first" (and not "legality"). These differences are perhaps in part traceable to the party affiliation of the various candidates for mayor, though this statement is more valid for the centre-right: in the cases analysed, when the candidate was a member of the *Popolo della Libertà* the watchword was "legality", whereas when the candidate was a member of the Northern League the watchword was: "our own come first".

7.1.3 Institutions and policy production. How much the black box produces

In analysing "*how many* responses institutions have given to the immigration issue", we have chosen to analyse their legislative production. This choice merits some preliminary considerations. The first is that policies are not only laws. The concept of policy is something much more complex (even a non-choice is in some respects part of a policy). The second is that not all laws are equal. Therefore, "making more laws" does not necessarily mean solving the problem. Our goal is simply to understand how much the immigration issue has occupied the overall legislative production of several Italian institutions. The Italian Parliament[10] produced (by approving them) the following acts[11] from 2006 to 2011.

[8] Cf. www.sindacopernapoli.it.
[9] Cf. www.giannilettieri.it.
[10] The study was conducted by examining the regulatory databases. Acts were looked for that contained in the text or title the terms: immigration OR foreigner* OR migrant* OR immigrant*. For 2011 the time period considered is from January 1st 2011 to August 25th 2011.
[11] The regulatory acts taken into consideration are the numbered acts published in the "Official Gazette (*Gazzetta ufficiale*)", General Series.

Table 7.5 Total acts and acts on immigration approved.

	Total	Immigration	V.%
2006	333	18	5.4
2007	266	16	6.0
2008	238	18	7.6
2009	211	20	9.5
2010	252	22	8.7
2011	192	6	3.1
Total	1,492	100	6.7

Source: Normattiva (www.normattiva.it)

In the (nearly) five years considered the acts approved related to immigration were 6.7% of the total. A not so significant portion if we consider the centrality of the issue for public opinion. A further consideration can be made on the various coalitions in the government. In Table 5 we can see that when the centre-right coalition was in control, the weight of immigration increased in the responses produced. The perception of citizens with regards to the different capacities of the two coalitions to handle the problem is to some extent confirmed by these data, if citizens measure capacity by the number of responses approved. Few citizens had indicated the centre-left as the coalition capable of handling the problem and in the period in which it governed (2006-2008), among the production of the black box, those on immigration composed less of the total compared to the period of government of the centre-right.

A second level of analysis is that at the regional level. We conducted the same study done for the Parliament in five Italian regions: Lombardy, Veneto, Piedmont, Emilia Romagna and Tuscany. The total results are presented in Table 7.6.

Table 7.6 Total number of regional laws approved and laws related to immigration.

Year	Total	Immigration	V.%
2006	187	5	2.7
2007	201	9	4.5
2008	196	8	4.1
2009	223	13	5.8
2010	167	7	4.2
2011	101	6	5.9
Total	1,075	48	4.5

Source: ISMU elaborations on data provided by the regional Councils

From 2006 to 2011 immigration was present in 4.5% of the regional laws, a figure that is lower than what was registered at the national level. The trend over time of this figure is however slightly different than the figure previously analysed: in this case the peak is in 2011. To examine the significance of this figure it is useful to look at the data disaggregated by region (Tab. 7.7).

Table 7.7 Regional laws on immigration.

Year	Lombardy			Veneto			Piedmont		
	Tot.	Imm.	V.%	Tot.	Imm.	V.%	Tot.	Imm.	V.%
2006	32	1	3.1	28	1	3.6	39	1	2.6
2007	36	3	8.3	36	1	2.8	29	1	3.4
2008	38	1	2.6	23	0	0.0	37	1	2.7
2009	33	2	6.1	30	1	3.3	38	3	7.9
2010	22	1	4.5	30	0	0.0	27	1	3.7
2011	15	2	13.3	17	0	0.0	16	0	0.0
Total	176	10	5.7	164	3	1.8	186	7	3.8

Year	Emilia Romagna			Tuscany		
	Tot.	Imm.	V.%	Tot.	Imm.	V.%
2006	23	2	8.7	65	0	0.0
2007	31	1	3.2	69	3	4.3
2008	25	4	16.0	73	2	2.7
2009	35	0	0.0	87	7	8.0
2010	18	2	11.1	70	3	4.3
2011	12	2	16.7	41	2	4.9
Total	144	11	7.6	405	17	4.2

Source: ISMU elaborations on data provided by the regional Councils

The region in which immigration had the most weight in terms of the laws produced is Emilia Romagna. The one with the least weight is Veneto. In 2011 Lombardy and Emilia Romagna legislated a great deal in this sector, while Veneto and Piedmont did not legislate at all. Tuscany is in the middle position. The diachronic analysis of the single regions shows that Tuscany and Piedmont had a peak in 2009 (a pre-election year) while the other regions had less constant trends.

In conclusion, the output related to immigration is a small percentage on the national scale and linked with the changing moods of public opinion over time. On the sub-national scale there are some regions that have legislated more (Emilia Romagna), rather than others (Veneto). The pattern that we deduced from the data on the national scale is thus reversed: the region that produced the most laws on immigration is of the centre-left whereas that which produced the least is of the centre-right.

7.2   Second Part: the Political System in Action

7.2.1 The Lampedusa landings and the war in Libya

The first signs of a possible (new) landings emergency on Lampedusa appeared in early February 2011. These flows were one of the most conspicuous consequences of the revolts that had broken out in various North African countries,

aiming at setting in motion processes of democratisation (the so-called "Arab Spring") in those countries, which got enormous media attention in our country[12]. The risk of a mass exodus of people towards Italy was very real according to the Minister of the Interior Roberto Maroni:

There is the risk of a real humanitarian emergency. There is a mass flight from Tunisia: there are citizens in search of international protection and there are criminals escaping from their prisons.

The opposition in Parliament pointed out the contradiction of having closed Lampedusa CIE (Identification and Expulsion Centre) right at the moment when it would have been most useful to have it open.

On 12 February the Council of Ministers approved[13] a set of related measures to respond to the emergency. It was made up of three actions: the declaration of a state of humanitarian emergency, the closing of the CIE, and the transfer of all the immigrants present on the island. However, the very next day the Ministry of the Interior, along with the Prefect of Palermo and the Commissioner for the immigrant emergency, decided to reopen Lampedusa CIE. At the same time[14] the Ministry of the Interior, pointing out the European Union's passivity in the face of the emergency, proposed (without success) to the Tunisian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to use Italian contingents in Tunisia to stop the flows.

In this phase the search for new reception structures in Sicily also immediately raised the alarm among the local population (and their institutional representatives)[15]. In the meantime from Brussels the response of the European Commissioner of Home Affairs (Cecilia Malmström) was soon forthcoming: she accused Italy of having refused the aid offered by the EU. The three words most frequently associated with the crisis were: emergency, illegals, and Europe. According to some[16] they are terms that are inadequate to describe the situation, useful perhaps only to represent it in a certain way. In all this the Conference of Italian Bishops called for the emergency to be handled with realism and humanity and proposed to open a humanitarian channel.

The solutions proposed by the Ministry of the Interior brought on strong reactions from other institutional actors. As soon as the Ministry's intention to distribute

[12] "The concentration in time and space of the arrivals has a devastating impact in particular because they are happening in an Italy that has for some time been digesting with difficulty immigration that is necessary, but also strong, rapid and unregulated." From *Cosa fare se l'Europa non ci aiuta*, "La Stampa", March 30th 2011, Giovanna Zincone.

[13] From *Lampedusa, 4mila arrivi in quattro giorni*, "Corriere della Sera", February 12th 2011, Alfio Sciacca.

[14] From *Maroni accusa: la UE ci lascia soli*, "Corriere della Sera", February 13th 2011, published online.

[15] From *Emergenza immigrati, Maroni in Sicilia*, "Corriere della Sera", February 14th 2011, published online.

[16] From *Tre parole su Lampedusa*, February 15th 2011, "lavoce.info", Maurizio Ambrosini.

the refugees among the Italian region became known, the regions (or at least some of them) reacted[17]: Lombardo (Sicily) argued that the refugees ought to be brought where there was work and therefore in Veneto and Lombardy; Zaia (Veneto) retorted that if the criterion was work, one needed to take the refugees out of Italy entirely. Moreover when the Minister for Institutional Reforms Umberto Bossi declared that if the refugees had arrived at their destination it would have been France and Germany, the French Minister of the Interior (Claude Gueant) responded[18]: "We ask the Italians to keep the people who present themselves on Italian territory and to take back those who are sent back". The result was that the customs checks in Ventimiglia became enormous, creating problems (also health problems, in addition to degradation and security) in the Ligurian town.

On March 30th Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi arrived in Lampedusa. On that occasion the measures were listed that would resolve the island's problems[19], products of the black box. The first concerned the distribution throughout the Italian regions of the immigrants present on the island within forty-eight to seventy hours. The others, not directly connected with the landings emergency, were of a compensatory nature for the inconveniences suffered by the inhabitants of Lampedusa: a Nobel Peace Prize for the island, a fiscal, welfare and banking moratorium in order to make Lampedusa a free trade zone, a tourism plan. The reactions of the opposition (PD, UdC, IdV) did not focus on the merit of the decisions announced, but rather criticised reliability of the Prime Minister who had announced them. Among the decisions made by the black box there was no proposal that attempted to highlight the usefulness of making agreements with the countries from which these migrants were coming[20].

An element that is not secondary is the fact that many of the actors involved in resolving the emergency found themselves in a phase in which they were engaged in gathering the support of public opinion, in addition to resolving the problems. In other words, they needed consensus[21]: Sarkozy with eye to the 2012 presidential election in France; Angela Merkel whose party had recently lost in the elections in Baden-Württemberg; the Italian government that was looking to the important upcoming administrative elections. These conditions undoubtedly made the decision-making arena tenser. On 6 April a new agreement was signed (State, regions and local offices) introducing two new instruments. The first is art. 20 of the Code of Laws concerning immigration that made it possible to adopt measures of temporary protection for important humanitarian needs. The second

[17] From *Il Viminale: profughi anche in Veneto*, "Corriere della Sera", February 23rd 2011, Marco Bonet and Michela Nicolussi Moro.

[18] From *Italia-Francia, la nuova cortina di ferro*, "Corriere della Sera", February 11th 2011, Jacopo Storni.

[19] From *Lampedusa, il giorno di Berlusconi «L'isola libera in due-tre giorni»*, "Corriere della Sera", March 30th 2011, published online.

[20] From *Cosa fare se l'Europa non ci aiuta*, "La Stampa", March 30th 2011, Giovanna Zincone.

[21] From *Una difficile strada obbligata*, "La Stampa", April 4th 2011, Giovanna Zincone.

is art. 5 of directive n. 55/2001 that provided for the granting of temporary protection in the event of an influx of evacuees. Moreover the decision to utilise various structures distributed throughout the country to accommodate the North-African immigrants was formalised. Some point out[22] the obvious elements of hypocrisy in these decisions. This was the argument advanced to support the interpretation: of the 28 thousand immigrants that arrived, only a minority was applying for asylum. Most of them had arrived for economic reasons and the standard practices would involve them being moved into CIEs to await deportation. Ten days later, returning to the island, the prime minister reopened the debate[23] over Europe's role in such situations. This was reinforced by the President of the Republic Giorgio Napolitano, according to whom "it is necessary and possible to speak with a single voice on immigration and the right to asylum". Berlusconi went on to declare that he had good arguments to convince France and Germany to treat the "Lampedusa" question as a European problem. The opposition was quick to point out the lack of credibility of these declarations. On 11 April Minister Maroni asked the other countries of Europe to share the burden of the situation. After this request was rejected (both by the countries and by the European Commission), the Italian government issued a temporary residence permit to 28 thousand Tunisians, which led to France, on April 17th, blocking a train coming from Italy with some Tunisians on aboard and threatening to suspend the Schengen Treaty[24]. The actions of the French government were based on concerns that were not unfounded: the permit issued by the Italian government would authorise the immigrants landed in Italy to circulate in the Schengen area for a period of three months. The point is that no one is able to guarantee that they do not stay illegally in a chosen country with expired permits. All this was done by exploiting the loopholes of the European treaties: the permit issued was for humanitarian reasons, while the immigrants were illegals looking for work. Some saw this choice as "an emergency exit and a fit of pique against insufficient European solidarity"[25].

The matter of military intervention in Libya, an issue that arose in the same weeks of the landings emergency in Lampedusa, could not be separated from the questions related to the possible migration repercussions of such an intervention. The decision-making process, which led to Italy's involvement in the Libyan war, was strongly influenced from the symbolic point of view by the implications in terms of migration flows that the war might trigger. In the first days of the war the Italian government seemed to be intent on not only keeping out of the military operations, but also on reducing its level of commitment to the various missions

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[22] From *Emergenza umanitaria tra ipocrisie e realtà*, April 8th 2011, "lavoce.info", Andrea Stuppini.
[23] From *Berlusconi a Lampedusa: isola svuotata «L'Ue sia concreta o è meglio dividerci»*, "Corriere della Sera", April 9th 2011, published online.
[24] From *Tim Hatton Rifugiati tra Lampedusa e Bruxelles*, May 3rd 2011, "lavoce.info".
[25] From *Egoismi, furbizie e piagnistei*, "La Stampa", April 14th 2011, Giovanna Zincone.

that the country was involved in; the decision changed a few days later[26] and the government gave the all clear for the bombing of Libya by Italian planes, despite the fact that the Northern League was against the intervention precisely because of its potential consequences in terms of migration flows. Confirmation of the particular modality with which the issue of the Libyan war entered the agenda comes from a warning made by the President of the Republic: "Let us not delude ourselves into making our borders impregnable fortress, today threats and the spread of instability do not stop at out borders".

7.2.2 Approval of the decree for the *Repatriation of illegals*

On 16 June the Council of Ministers issued a decree law on immigration for the repatriation of illegal foreign nationals. The decree provided for several regulations on the procedure of forced deportation, the extension of the period of stay in CIEs, some jurisdictions entrusted to the Justice of Peace and some measures adjusting the national law in directive n. 38/2004 and n. 115/2008. The timing of the approval of this decree is one way to interpret the contents of it, as are the strategies used to communicate the approved proposal. On the one hand the slow progress of the events in Libya, on the other hand the approach of an important moment for the Northern League (the Pontida rally) are the principal elements that suggested a close gathering of interests and preferences for the black box to produce something regarding the immigration issue. The opposition judged the responses produced as being unfeasible and demagogic[27]. The idea that the act functioned more as a way for gathering consensus than for responding to a problem is strengthened by the analysis of the differences between the measures presented to the public and the actual content of the act[28]. In reality the directive implements two EU directives and arrives after a decision by the European Court of Justice (of 28 April 2011) inviting the Italian State to legislate an update of its laws. For this reason the Italian government provided for the rejection of the sentence of imprisonment for illegals. The communication was however centred on other aspects (some of which are simply impracticable[29]) formulated to respond to the demands that in any case arrived from the political system.

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[26] From *Sì a bombardamenti mirati sulla Libia*, "Corriere della Sera", April 25th 2011, published online.
[27] From *Berlusconi: 'Libia non diventi pantano' Immigrazione, nei Cie fino a 18 mesi*, "Repubblica", June 16th 2011, published online.
[28] From *Il buon cibo che serve all'Italia*, "La Stampa," June 19th 2011, Giovanna Zincone.
[29] From *La politica dei respingimenti*, "Repubblica", June 19th 2011, Adriano Prosperi.

7.2.3 The ban of the burqa

On August 1st the Commission of Constitutional Affairs of the Chamber of Deputies approved a *Disegno di Legge* (DDL, Legislative proposal) banning the wearing of "ethnic" garments that cover the face. The act is to be discussed by the Parliament by the end of the year. In the Commission the PdL, the Northern League and the *Responsabili* voted in favour, the IdV, UdC and FLI parties abstained, and the PD voted against the act.

The law provided for monetary fines (up to 500 euro) for those who do not comply with the ban as well as imprisonment of up to one year, in addition much heavier fines (up to 30 thousand euro) for those obliging others to wear the burqa or go out in public with their face covered. Promoting the law is the PDL representative of Moroccan descent, Souad Sbai, who defined the commission's vote as historic:

Today we have struck a decisive blow for an act of freedom and civilisation. Let us not stop on the path to the liberation of women who are segregated and without rights. In France, Belgium, and in the Muslim Azerbaijan this law is a reality, and no Arab Muslim woman has even given a thought to protesting[30].

According[31] to the Minister for Equal Opportunities Mara Carfagna:

The full veil is never a free choice made by women, but a sign of cultural and physical oppression: banning it in public places means giving immigrant women back their freedom.

The PD expressed its opposition through Senator Vittoria Franco who called the proposal "a mistake", aggravated by the provision of fines and confinement to punish those who do not comply. The Islamic community expressed doubts about the *DDL*: "A law banning the veil is an injustice that touches individual liberty", commented Roberto Hamza Piccardo, spokesperson of UCOII, the Union of Islamic Communities in Italy[32].

7.3   Concluding Observations

The twofold analysis that has been offered here has first of all confirmed how, again in 2011, the immigration had relevant importance. In our opinion there are

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four main elements that emerged. The first is related to public opinion: immigration is, especially in Italy, a primary concern, even though its intensity is slightly on the decline compared to the past, just as the way in which the phenomenon manifests itself has partially changed (immigrants are less and less seen as a risk for one's own job; many feel that it is correct to give immigrants the right to vote in municipal elections).

The second stems from the contents of the local elections' policy proposals. Immigration was present in the electoral programmes and the solutions proposed by the two sides of the political spectrum were markedly different. One consideration, which however ought to be investigated more systematically and representatively, is motivated by the fact that the watchwords summing up the platforms vary, in the centre-right, according to the party of mayoral candidate, while in the centre-left the watchword seems to be independent from the party to which the mayor candidate belongs.

The third element concerns the performance of the decision-making black box. While at the national level the periods in which immigration is most present among the acts approved coincide with the years of government of the centre-right, at the regional level we saw that the region that treated the issue the most times in its acts is of the centre-left and the region that approved the least is of the centre-right.

Lastly, the fourth element, linked to the analysis of certain events of 2011, relates to the consequences of this issue's centrality to the decision-making process: on one hand, it is capable of heavily influencing foreign policy decisions that could (and according to some should) be made according to a different logic and other criteria; on the other hand, the decision-making process is strongly affected by the proximity to (or distance from) election deadlines.

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[30] From *Primo sì al divieto di usare il burqa*, "La Stampa", August 2nd 2011, published online.
[31] From *Camera, primo sì verso il divieto del burqa*, "Corriere della Sera", August 2nd 2011, published online.
[32] From *Burqa, primo sì al divieto A settembre il voto in aula*, "Repubblica", August 2nd 2011, published online.

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