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## Decentralization in Italy and Greece: a diverging trajectory

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### Abstract

Italy and Greece are two Mediterranean countries that are often paralleled in public policy and discourse because of their strong party patronage systems, perceived bureaucracy, Napoleonic governance traditions and clientelism, however an issue that separates them is decentralization. An analysis of the main decentralization indexes confirms an important difference in the level of local autonomy between the two countries, with Italy exhibiting a minor trend towards federalism over the last four decades while Greece remains one of the most unitary and highly centralized countries in the European Union. Moreover, decentralization reform in Italy is a more gradual and continuous process, while in Greece decentralization occurs in a rarer and more brutal scope. This difference in decentralization approaches has led to divergent outcomes in local governance, regional development, and political power distribution within each country, despite their shared Southern European context and historical similarities.

### Key-words

Italy, Greece, decentralization, delegation, reform, centralism



## 1. Introduction

This essay provides an overview of the decentralization reform history in Italy and Greece, presents the main Decentralization Indexes for the two countries and highlights their commonalities and differences. Italy and Greece share characteristics due to their European Union membership, administrative systems and state traditions (Kickert 2011). Ongaro (2010) argues that the two countries are united in their centralism, strong political control over bureaucracy; party patronage, clientelism in personnel recruitment; a deep legalism rooted in the Napoleonic tradition, and institutional fragmentation. Burrioni et al. (2021) propose that Southern European countries<sup>1</sup> belong to the same ‘family of states’ due to their shared traits, which creates an interesting case for political, institutional and economic comparison.

However, despite the two countries being grouped together as post-Napoleonic states constructed in a fragmented arrangement and a legalistic culture that inhibits the development of economic and societal innovation (Lambropoulou & Oikonomou 2018) their decentralization trajectories are considerably different. The impact of bureaucratic traditions may be profound, significantly shaping each state's approach to crafting and guiding its economic policies, but they are not the only variable defining political and institutional change (Lippi & Tsekos 2019).

In both countries governments declared a desire to bring an end to centralism and over the last four decades implemented extensive public sector reforms, while also attempting to reconstruct their system of territorial governance and implement decentralization reforms (Capano et al. 2024). Nevertheless, the outcomes of the reform efforts varied significantly. In Italy, the move towards decentralization unfolded gradually, influenced by political circumstances that introduced contradictions and ambiguities (Palermo & Wilson 2014). Conversely, Greece's efforts towards decentralization were marked by their brevity and lack of robustness, with successive governments perceiving decentralization as merely an obligation in the pursuit of establishing a modern state (Hlepas 2012).

The rationale of the analysis presented in this essay is discovering the extent to which Italy and Greece can be grouped together as Southern European countries when framed within a European decentralization perspective. While both are Southern European nations with a history of centralized governance, their paths towards decentralization are too



divergent to be grouped under the same umbrella. Italy has made substantial progress in devolving power to regional and local authorities, while Greece maintains a more centralized system with limited powers delegated to local governments (Spyropoulos & Fortsakis 2023; Oikonomou, 2019). The motivations and outcomes of decentralization efforts in these countries have been markedly different. Italy's process has been driven by regional identity politics, economic disparities between north and south, and a desire to improve administrative efficiency (Giovannin & Vampa 2020; Alessi & Palermo 2022). Greece has faced challenges in implementing meaningful decentralization due to a strong tradition of centralism, economic constraints, and concerns about maintaining national unity (Hlepas 2020). These distinctions underscore the importance of examining each country's unique context when analyzing decentralization processes, rather than assuming similarities based on geographical proximity or broad cultural categorizations.

The examination of decentralization characteristics in Italy and Greece involved an analysis using primary decentralization indexes and a literature review. Since the research focus is on a historical analysis, we selected databases that offer longitudinal data. By focusing on diachronic data, researchers can track the evolution of decentralization processes over time and analyze its historical development. These indexes serve as crucial tools for measuring the extent to which power and decision-making authority are distributed from central governments to lower levels of administration.

Measuring decentralization and its various elements is not easy (Harguindéguy et al. 2019). Decentralization includes multiple dimensions such as political, administrative and fiscal which do not always align (Schneider 2003). As a result, creating an objective and universally accepted measure of overall decentralization is nearly impossible (Martinez-Vazquez & Timofeev 2010). Even though the task of measuring decentralization is challenging, it has consistently drawn the attention of scholars from various branches of social sciences (Harguindéguy et al. 2019).

The principal Decentralization Index is the Regional Autonomy Index, which measures the authority in self-rule and shared rule exercised by regional governments within their countries on the basis of regional datasets which include annual scores for regional governments or tiers and a country data set that aggregates these scores to the country level (Hooghe et. al 2016). Further Indexes such as the similar Local Autonomy Index developed



by the European Commission (Ladner, et al. 2015) and the 2009 Assembly of European Regions are presented (AER 2009a; AER 2009b).

All three Decentralization Indexes paint a similar picture, Italy is a medium-high decentralized country (i.e. more decentralized than the European average), while Greece is one of the more centralized European countries. Thus, Italian regions have more political power and policy making ability than their Greek counterparts do. It is important to note that Italy has five Regions that are governed by a Special Autonomy Statute (i.e. Sicily, Sardinia, Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol, Friuli-Venezia Giulia & Valle D'Aosta), while all Greek regions are governed by the same legislative framework (the Monastic Republic of Mount Athos is a self-governed and sovereign part of the Greek State). Nonetheless, even though Italy may have an above average degree of decentralization; there is also a distinctive centralism (described as centralism without center) which is the result of the struggle between historic forces of localism and a desire for a strong unitary state (Romanelli 1995; Cafagna 1999).

This essay demonstrates, contrary to the literature that has highlighted the administrative and political similarities between Italy and Greece (Kickert 2011) that they experienced distinctly different paths of decentralization.

## 2. The difficulty in defining decentralization

The decentralization debate is often characterized by a lack of consensus and broadness.<sup>11</sup> This varying range of opinions on the issue of decentralization can be attributed to the sheer size of the literature, which spans more than five decades and hundreds of countries, as well as on the diversity of the research methods and scientific backgrounds (i.e. Economics, Political Science, Geography, Sociology, Anthropology, Public Administration, etc.) of the researchers (Greig et al. 2007; Faguet 2004).

Although decentralization has a significant economic element, it is chiefly a political phenomenon; decentralization is the main aspect of the territorial dimension of politics and is inherently local-favoring. Canavire-Bacarreza et al. (2017: 1210) propose that a country's decentralization trajectory is heavily influenced by its geography. This argument is based on the logic that more geographically diverse countries tend to show greater heterogeneity among their citizens, including their preferences and needs for public goods and services



provision. The link between decentralization, politics and geography is so strong that it can be traced back to the emergence of the idea of what constitutes a state.<sup>III</sup> States are defined by their ability to enforce and exercise independent control over the people and institutions that live within their territorial borders. However, direct rule from the center is practically impossible if a territory is too large. Therefore, the Government delegates some of its authority and responsibilities to subnational groups and institutions (Heywood 2013). Consequently, decentralization is mainly a result of states trying to safeguard their existence. States that are unwilling to compromise and decentralize are prone to splintering and collapsing (Shorten 2016).

Due to the political nature of decentralization the debate in the literature is characterized by each author's perception of the failings of the modern state and the philosophical optimal size and structure of government. Proponents of decentralization often base their arguments on the hypothesis of a wasteful and ineffective central government, which breeds clientelism, corruption and political alienation, hence, if we accept that the nature of the central government is *de facto* inefficient and to some extent unrepresentative, because of its distance from citizens and the size of its bureaucracy, a logical solution could be to decrease its authority by delegating responsibilities to the local level (Faguet 2014). However, the issue appears to be more complex since corruption does not necessarily decrease when decentralization increases. Some studies show that decentralization reduces corruption, whereas others conclude that corruption increases with decentralization (Lessmann & Markwards 2010; Treisman 2007). The differences in the results of similar policies can be attributed to their implementation and the differences in the political environment. An effective policy seems to require accountability and politicians facing strong pressure from their constituents (Mansuri & Rao 2012). The smallness and intimacy of local politics may facilitate corrupt relations, according to empirical evidence from countries such as Germany, the USA, the Philippines and Italy (Rodden & Rose-Ackerman 1997; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka 2016).

Decades of inconclusive research on the effects of decentralization on service delivery and corruption have led to a shift in focus towards the impact of decentralization on the quality of governance itself. One of the main weaknesses of arguments in favor of decentralization is that they are based upon the idea that it leads to increased accountability, participation and democratization (Fox & Goodfellow 2016), thus critics of decentralization





argue that there are no a priori reasons why bringing decision-making closer to the people would obligatorily improve social welfare and the democratic process (Faguet 1997; Heller 2000). Some critics even assert that political power can be detrimental to fostering an accountable and efficient political system because of the ability of local elites to exercise their power more ruthlessly and callously without strong national supervision (Beall 2005)

Arguments based on economic theory are also ambiguous, proving the advantage of decentralization in terms of allocative efficiency using economic models has failed to yield conclusive results (Fox & Goodfellow 2016). The literature seems to suggest that decentralization has achieved moderate results in some states, moderate failures in others and occasionally both (Andrews 2013). Characteristically the World Bank in its 1997 World Development Report (p. 120) notes that:

‘decentralization offers the chance to match public services more closely with local demands and preferences and to build more responsive and accountable government from below. But decentralization also has its pitfalls, including the possibility of increased disparity across regions, loss of macroeconomic stability, and institutional capture by local factions, especially in highly unequal societies’.

Therefore, because of the inability to safely generalize empirical evidence can prove to be quite useful in helping us understand why some decentralization programs fail, while others succeed. Is this a result of erroneous design of policy or lack of capacity to implement them? The answers to these questions may be key to understanding decentralization and its effects.

When discussing decentralization, it is useful to define it by reviewing the various definitions given by both researchers and the agencies that implement it. It must also be noted that the word ‘decentralization’ is more of an umbrella term that encompasses distinct processes and ideas than an analytically precise term per se (Faguet 1997).

The most used definition is provided by Rondinelli, et al. (1983: 13) as:

‘the transfer of responsibility for planning, management, and resource-raising and allocation from the central government to (a) field units of central government ministries or agencies; (b) subordinate units or levels of government; (c) semi-autonomous public authorities or corporations; (d) area-wide regional or functional authorities; or (e) NGOs/PVOs.’

Most definitions of decentralization –broadly- describe it as a process of transferring power from national to local government institutions and organizations; however, they



subsequently categorize it into different types (World Bank 1997; Greig et al. 2007; Bailey 1999). This phenomenon is representative of the argument that decentralization is more representative of a category than a term itself; the literature places more emphasis on the subtypes, their definitions and interaction than the hypernym.

Treisman (2002) proposed a different approach to decentralization, according to which decentralization has either a dynamic or a static interpretation. If we understand decentralization as dynamic, it is the process of becoming decentralized, whereas its static interpretation is the state of being decentralized. Treisman notes that some usages of the word decentralization imply that systems are either ‘decentralized’ or ‘centralized’, which can be considered a false dichotomy if decentralization is perceived as a continuous phenomenon. According to this approach decentralization is simply a characteristic of compound systems (i.e. multi-tiered administrative systems, in which all final decision-making authority is held by the highest tier); it is the interaction between the various tiers of administration.

### 3. The evolution of decentralization in Italy

Italy has been undergoing decentralization granting more power to local and regional authorities since 1946, further steps towards decentralization were made in the 1990s (Fabbrini & Brunazzo 2003; Pola 2008; Pola 2010; Palermo & Wilson 2014; Desideri 2014; Jansen 2017). This process of institutional change has been rather chaotic; thus, the history of the Italian state can be divided into four phases (Baldini & Baldi 2014):

1. the **Liberal Age** from Italy’s founding in 1861 to World War I in 1915,
2. the **Fascist Age** (1922-43)
3. the **First Republic** (1946-92)
4. the **Second Republic** (1992-)

Italy struggles with a tradition of centralism, which can be traced back to Italy’s founding in 1861, and a robust tradition of localism (Baldini & Baldi 2014). Leonardi et al. (1981: 95) go so far as to argue that ‘The history of regional reform in Italy can be described as a protracted political war between the supporters of the center versus those of the periphery’. This difficulty in implementing reform led to a complex political culture, which, instead of





replacing previous institutional assets tries to work around them or convert them into something new (Pola 2010; Baldini & Baldi 2014).

Even though there were proponents of a decentralized state since the beginning, such as Cavour, the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Sardinia-Piedmont and later the first Prime Minister of Italy, the opposition which favored a more centralized state prevailed (Ziblatt 2006). The decision for a unitary and centralistic system of governance can be interpreted on the basis of three factors. The first one is the fear that local identities could threaten the unity of a nascent country which in its early stages had weak legitimacy (Romanelli 1995; Cafagna 1999; Astuto 2011). Concerns about centrifugal tendencies were founded on the resistance to the Italian state that was encountered in the South and the Papacy's hostility to Italy's unification process, a problem that was solved militarily with the conquest of Rome (Hine 1996).

A second factor which favored centralization was the weak institutional and bureaucratic capacity of the kingdoms that unified to form the new Italian state. Ziblatt (2006) argues that in Italy unlike Germany, where preexisting countries managed to negotiate some self-rule, political insufficiencies caused a lack of significant regional concessions in the critical stages of the country's founding process. Finally, according to Fedele (2010) and Putnam (1993), the third factor was a strong municipal power that could be traced back to the Italian medieval city-state. These historic local identities influenced the course of unification by legitimizing the unorthodox Italian centralism.

The centrifugal forces that challenged the legitimacy of the Italian state combined with citizen's entrenched localism to create an unusual relation between center and periphery, which is described in the literature as 'centralismo senza centro' (i.e. centralism without center) (Romanelli 1995; Cafagna 1999; Astuto 2011; Piretti 2011; Galli della Loggia 1998). Enduring socio-economic inequalities, chiefly the economic underdevelopment of the South, made public administration standardization efforts more difficult to implement (Romanelli 1995; Melis 1996). In the first phase of Italian Governance and Politics, we encounter issues that became persistent such as clientelism and *trasformismo*<sup>IV</sup> (Tullio Altan 2000). Furthermore, due to the ambiguities of the constitutional framework national executives, to survive in parliament, constantly needed to rely on notables whose power was entrenched locally, especially in the South, in patron-client relations, which could channel local interests in the national arena (Rebuffa 2003; Macry 2012). This practice, known as *trasformismo*,



meant that coalitions were unstable and no real political alternation took place. Thus, in a society where the propensity to accept and offer bribes was traditionally high, centralism was negotiated instead of imposed and vested interests in preserving these unorthodox dynamics soon developed, as 'parliament became a true compensation chamber where local and personal interests came to replace more genuinely political issues' (Musella 2003: 48).

The gradual transformation of the Italian State from a Centralized Napoleonic State similar to France to a limited Centralized State based on a political bargain between the Center and the Periphery is a process known 'Piemontesizzazione' (from the Kingdom of Piedmont) (Cafagna 1999; Astuto 2011). The Liberal phase was characterized by fostering decentralization and the dynamics of bargained centralism. Local governments were reinforced with reforms that increased both political and administrative decentralization, such as the election of mayors and heads of provincial offices introduced in 1888 and the transfer of more policy competences (1903). Centralism was also adapted to the initial development of the welfare state and the parallel democratization process via the progressive extension of the electoral franchise (1867, 1882, 1913) and the slow birth of mass parties (Baldini & Baldi 2014).

This process of bargained decentralization and increased democratization was halted by the rise of fascism. The Fascist Era (1922-43) saw increased central control and political pluralism was discontinued (Romanelli 1995; Vesperini 2004). The office of the mayor was abolished in 1926 while provincial councils were suppressed two years later in 1928. Centralization during this era was so significant that the subnational share of public spending fell dramatically, from 34% in 1913 to 13% in 1940 and local taxation fell from 26.6% in 1913 to 18.7% in 1939 (Melis, 1996).

The so-called first Republic (1946-92)<sup>v</sup> restarted the process of decentralization that had been interrupted. The 1948 Constitution tried to address territorial grievances and stop any possible resurgence of fascism. Thus, the decisive institution was inspired by France's 1946 Fourth Republic constitution, which meant that the crucial institution in Italian politics would be the parliament and not the executive branch unlike many other contemporary democracies (Amoretti, 2011). Political pressure by the ethno-linguistic minorities in the North near the borders and the separatist pressures from Sicily and Sardinia, as well as the historic problem of the developmental divide between the north and south, as well as the mountainous regions of the Apennines, led to a parliamentary compromise that promoted



political regionalism as a new form of decentralization (Trigilia 1992; Bassanini 2012). This post-war phase saw many similarities to Italy's Liberal Age, with the main parties finding a consensus on institutional reform, while not completely giving up on their unique brand of centralism and preserving a political alliance with agents of localism (Macry, 2012).

Another factor that influenced the political environment of the First Republic was the polarization of the electoral process due to the ideological divide between communism and anti-communism dominating discussions, leading to a veto-ridden governance structure (Baldini & Baldi 2014). The main political parties agreed on a change towards regionalism, without giving up on the basic idea of centralism, as this was more consistent with their political strategies (and beliefs). Like most left-wing parties the PCI (Italian Communist Party) and PSI (Italian Socialist Party), favored the preservation of centralism as a guarantee of nation-wide homogeneous welfare provisions. While the DC (Christian Democracy) was formally a proponent of increased regionalization, in reality it benefited from maintaining the traditional alliance with localism, given its key role as a political broker in patron-client relations, mainly in Southern Italy (Hine 1996; Macry 2012).

Despite the fact that the constitution created a new level of government, it did not change the overall institutional culture: layering won out over replacement. A regional state was envisioned, with legislative power devolved to the regions, but it would still resemble a unitary rather than a federal state, because the regions were not granted fiscal autonomy or territorial representation, including participation in constitutional amendments, and decentralization was largely guided by central institutions (top-down) (Perulli 2013). The constitution protected local government architecture, which was still governed by the 1934 frame legislation and was directly controlled by the central government (and not by the regions). Five 'special' regions (RS) were given extensive self-rule powers and immediate construction of elected regional assemblies, including the two largest islands (Sicily and Sardinia) and three areas with ethno-linguistic minorities (Aosta Valley, Trentino Alto-Adige, and Friuli Venezia-Giulia). The remaining 15 'ordinary' regions ('Regioni Ordinarie' or "RO") were guaranteed a more limited set of competencies (Masseti 2007). This asymmetry reflects a two-fold logic: on the one hand, the goal of building a more democratic and efficient system of government (top-down) by respecting pluralism in mobilized territories (a bottom-up dynamic) and preventing centrifugal tendencies (Putnam et al. 1985; Groppi 2007).



ROs were similarly established to adhere to the notion of 'democracy by proximity' (even in places where no political player demanded autonomy) and to simplify development planning, thereby offering assistance to the undeveloped South under rigorous central oversight. While the RS was put up immediately, the RO was not deployed until the 1970s. The Christian Democratic Party 'was the more convinced champion of a wide regional autonomy' inside the constituent assembly, 'partly because of the idea that the left would soon have taken over the national parliament, and that autonomous regional bodies might prevent Communism from controlling the country' (Mazzoleni 2009b: 206).

ROs were implemented as part of the coalition agreement struck by the DC, PSI, Italian Social Democratic Party (PSDI), and Italian Republican Party (PRI) to form the country's first center-left government (Mazzoleni, 2009a). By that time, the PCI, the primary opposition party, had become more regionalist, following a pattern that would soon be followed by other European center-left parties (for example, the Socialists in France and the Labour Party in the United Kingdom). The objective was to capitalize on electoral support resulting in the establishment of an institutional level at which the party could govern (Putnam et al. 1985). Despite an agreement, the RO was only given the means to become active in 1977 (DPR n. 616). However, the decentralization trend was quickly reversed and the Italian regions eventually found themselves with less leeway when it came to constitutional architecture. Regional finance would be fully reliant on state transfers, and sub-state revenues fell substantially from 14.7 percent in 1950 to 3.2 percent in 1980 during a period of re-centralization following the fiscal reform that began in 1971 (Baldini & Baldi 2014). Parliament continued to legislate in areas assigned to regions, robbing Italian regionalism of one of its most important prerogatives (Putnam et al. 1985). Finally, regions were never given control over local administration, giving them an uncertain role in relations between the center and periphery (Baldi and Agostini 2011). Thus, regions did not gain traction in representing territorial concerns, which preferred the previous informal party structures based on the centralism-localism combination.

In the 90s the fourth Italian institutional change started, known as the Second Republic. This phase, unlike the previous ones, was influenced by a resurgent regionalist movement and more pressure for reform by the citizenry. The traditional political party of Christian Democrats collapsed and the Northern League (Lega Nord) started gaining traction (Diamanti 2003). The Northern League complained about the centralized status quo and



advocated devolution to regions of more legislative powers as well as fiscal federalism (full autonomy in tax raising and management of fiscal revenues), even threatening secession (Amoretti 2011). Although this view would not be easily stomached by the South, it struck a chord with public opinion. Territorial politics acquired unprecedented salience, and almost all parties soon claimed to be in favor of federalism. A window of opportunity for institutional reforms opened up to meet EU requirements for the increased political and fiscal accountability of sub-state governments (Fabbrini and Brunazzo 2003). Many reforms, including a major constitutional reform in 2001, were approved strengthening decentralization (Lanzalaco 2005). Political decentralization was increased by both the direct elections of chief executives at all sub-state levels and the transfer of many competences and responsibilities. The sub-state shares of public spending moved from 26.8% in 1980 to 31.6% in 2008, while fiscal revenues increased remarkably from 3.2% in 1980 to 22.5% in 2007 (Baldini & Baldi 2014). Federal principles were included in the constitution, reversing the traditional criteria for assigning powers with a strict definition of the state's legislative powers and the devolution of all other legislative powers to the regions (Bassanini 2012), introducing fiscal federalism and embryonic mechanisms of territorial representation in both national and European policy-making. Both constitutional and ordinary legislation significantly strengthened regional autonomy, overcoming the weaknesses of the past, on a similar dynamic of federalization by devolution experienced by other European countries such as: Belgium, Spain and, to some extent, the UK. Regions acquired more powers and responsibilities, new constitutional guarantees, and their executives became more stable and legitimate.

Nevertheless, this process of decentralization encountered some difficulties and resistance, such as regions being represented neither in national law-making nor constitutional amendment processes (Baldi & Tronconi 2011; Massetti 2012). This intense season of reform strengthened not only the regional level, but also local governments, in continuity with the tradition of localism (Dente 1997), so much so that the amended constitution refers to the Italian state as a 'republic of autonomies', by placing regions, provinces and municipalities on equal footing (Groppi & Olivetti 2003; Cepiku 2013).

Italian federalizing trends strengthened in the 1990s and the 2000s. A decentralization process began in the 1990s with the introduction of a direct election of mayors, culminating in 2009, when Law 42 established the principles of fiscal federalism, guaranteeing a higher





level of autonomy for regions and local authorities. There are 20 regions (15 of which have ordinary status and 5 have a special status guaranteeing those more powers), 103 provinces and 8,088 municipalities. However, only 136 of these municipalities have a population of more than 50,000 inhabitants, while more than 92% of the municipalities have a population that does not reach 15,000 inhabitants (i.e. 7466 municipalities) (Mussari & Giordano 2013).

Italian public sector reforms generally involve every level of government (central administrations, regions, provinces, local governments, agencies, hospitals and universities) with varying degrees of intensity. In the case of local governments, the reforms of the early 1990s implied an increase in autonomy in three key areas: organizational (managerial) autonomy through the Local Government Reform Act in 1990, civil service reform in 1993, and local government accounting reform in 1995 (Anessi Pessina 2002).

The decentralization reform process was substantially completed in 2001, vis-à-vis the reform of the second part of the Italian Constitution and the introduction of a horizontal subsidiary as a guiding principle for the assignment of responsibilities among different tiers of governance. In fact, at the constitutional level, the reforms redistributed not only legislative powers between central and regional governments (Article 117), but also administrative functions between central and local governments (Article 118), and they granted greater financial autonomy to lower levels of government (Article 119) (Bordignon et al. 2007).

Mussari and Giordano (2013) argue that the main purpose of these reforms was to enhance efficiency, accountability, manageability, and autonomy in a multi-tiered government, however the extent of their success can be debated as the overall increase in Italian public sector spending did not lead to a significant decrease in regional inequalities. The shifting of powers from central to local governments failed to produce the expected expenditure reductions of central entities, while on the other side of the spectrum; local governments generally increased their expenditures to manage their new functions. Additionally, inefficient intergovernmental financial relations (characterized by grants calculated on historical expenditures, central bailout expectations, and the lack of sanction mechanisms for local government fiscal indiscipline) have tended to stimulate overspending within local governments and produce unsustainable deficits (Baldini & Baldi 2014). The devolution of services, when accompanied by negative factors such as sunk costs, has often generated inefficiencies and much higher public spending (Cepiku et al. 2016).





Another legacy of these reforms has been duplication and confusion in many areas of shared rule among governmental tiers. An example is the 2001 Constitutional reform that introduced concurrent legislation (i.e. national and regional laws have the same force) in policy areas such as energy, tourism and industry, among others. This increased the level of conflict between the regional and central governments, because of weak coordination mechanisms (Palermo & Valdesalici 2019).

In recent years, the issue of decentralization has reemerged and become an important topic of political discourse centered on the ‘Differentiated Autonomy’ (in Italian *Autonomia Differenziata*) proposal. During the pandemic period, the Italian administrative system encountered several difficulties and was a subject of criticism, due to these experiences new arrangements of local self-governance were proposed (Dini & Zilli 2020). Differentiated autonomy proposes the allocation of more functions to ordinary statute regions in the implementation of Article 116 of the Constitution (Bordignon et al. 2023). The topic is highly contested in Italian politics with proponents arguing that it would increase the efficiency of public services, while a common argument against it is that it would increase the north-south divide with the richer northern regions retaining more resources and thus having better services compared to their southern counterparts (Andrianopoulou 2023).

#### **4. The evolution of decentralization in Greece**

Greece is one of the most centralized and unitary states in the European Union, thus the Greek state has been characterized for most of its history by a reluctance to cede a significant share of political power, decision-making and resources to decentralized administrative structures and local governments (Verney & Papageorgiou 2007; Christofilopoulou 2008). Even though elected offices have existed since the founding of the country, their institutional framework was limited and fragmented, and the local level was often a subject of control and supervision by the center (Verney & Papageorgiou 2007). Mouzelis (1995) described the Greek political system of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as ‘decentralized clientelism’. Most decentralization reforms in Greece take place after the country’s accession to the European Community in 1979 and the decades of the 80s and the 90s were a time of great administrative reform (Karanikolas & Hatzipanteli 2010).



Loughlin (2001: 272) argues that this strong centralism is the result of the way the Greek state was created and expanded. Of Greece's current geographical territory, only 36% has been part of the state since independence; the rest was added after peace treaties with the last addition being as recent as 1947. This national liberation struggle and the existence of military threats led the Greek state to emphasize centralization and territorial unification in their political ideologies.

The establishment of the modern Greek state, beginning in 1833, is linked to the enforcement of centralization and the abandonment of a longstanding tradition of autonomy that was characteristic of the 'fragmented' societies common in many regions under Ottoman control. In a nation accustomed to multiple power centers, no single center was willing to easily accept the authority of the national government. It was only the firm control of the Bavarian regents that succeeded in unifying and consolidating power (Koliopoulos & Veremis 2009). The 1844 Constitution, based on the 1830 French and 1831 Belgian constitutions, provided for the protection of individual rights and established constitutional monarchy referring to Otto as 'King of Greece by the Grace of God'. The legislative power was exercised by the King, who had the right to ratify legislation, by the elected parliament, and by the senate, whose members were appointed for life by the king. Both the parliament and the senate were self-standing and had to approve taxes. The king had the right to dissolve the parliament and call for elections. He also retained the right to choose and remove ministers. The king was the source of judicial power and appointed the judges (Tridimas 2018).

The Greek Decentralized administrative system and the wider administrative law, since its inception in 1830 were based on France (Hlepas 2010). This French influence culminated with the adoption of the 'prefet' system, which meant that until the regional elections of 1994, Greece's regional governors and/or 'préfets' were selected by the government of the day. Greek 'préfets' were political appointees entrusted with the task of monitoring the elected mayors in their own 'prefecture' (Lalenis 2003; Getimis & Demetropoulou 2005). Depending on the local political circumstances, mayors disputed the authority of the 'préfets'. In this context, today's seven 'decentralized administrations' can be understood as a legacy of 'prefecture' system and a compromise of the long historical tension between elected officials and appointed officials in charge of Greece's sub-national authorities (Lalenis & Liogkas, 2002; Christofilopoulou, 1990).



It should be noted that the same pattern of dependence of the local government on the state is reproduced by the region in its relations with the state in the area of its jurisdiction. Indeed, as it is organized on the model of the central administration, it also reproduces its basic problems. The organizational problems of public administration (mismanagement, bureaucracy, clientelism, transactionalism) are likewise reproduced in local governments, but also in their relations with citizens and the policies it implements (Petrakos & Psycharis, 2004).

Another Greek peculiarity is the lack of regional pressure for decentralization. Unlike countries such as Spain and Italy, there are no significant regional movements in Greece that push for more autonomy and decentralization reforms (Lalenis & Liogkas 2002). Greece is largely uniform in terms of its ethnic composition, as most of its population speaks the same language and follow the Greek Orthodox faith (Zachos 2009). Nonetheless, there are still minority groups within the country. The most significant of these, and the only one officially acknowledged and safeguarded by international treaties, is the Muslim minority residing in Thrace. The minority, despite rallying around a strong call for self-determination during the latter part of the 1980s, did not demand regional autonomy and instead focused on electing representatives at the national level. The 1991 change in electoral law, which introduced a national minimum three percent threshold for a political party to enter parliament made it practically impossible for the minority, due to its small size, to elect representatives outside the main Greek parties, marking the beginning of a decline in support for separatist politics (Anagnostou 2001; Hlepas 2015).

Regional authorities gained various administrative competencies over time and because of pressure from EU authorities (Siminou 2007). The 13 regional administrations have also absorbed EU funding provided by the Union's regional strategy since its inception in 1986. However, most powers remain largely in the hands of the central government. Most crucially, on certain policy matters, there are shared competences between the central government and sub-national authorities, allowing the central government to participate in the day-to-day management of regional and local issues (Oikonomou 2016).

The main decentralization reforms in Greece during the EU era were the following three:

1. 1986, the establishment of administrative regions



2. Kapodistrias in 1998, sharply reduced the number of municipalities and communities [from 5775 (441 municipalities and 5382 communities) to 1033 (900 municipalities and 133 communities)] and regional governors were appointed by the state.
3. Kallikrates in 2011, municipalities are further decreased to 325 and regional governors were directly elected.

Table 1. Elements of Kapodistrias and Kallikrates reforms (Ioannidis 2015:6)

	Kapodistrias 1998	Kallikrates 2011
First tier of local government	900 municipalities and 133 communities	325 municipalities
Second tier of local government	52 prefectures	13 regions
Regional Authority	13 regions	13 regions, now second tier of local government
Election system	Direct election for mayors, presidents of the communities and prefects. Appointment of regional governors by the state	Direct election for mayors, presidents of the communities and regional governors.
Level of Competences	Low level of competences for communities, municipalities and prefectures. Regional governors implement the rule of the state	High level of competences for municipalities and regions. Cognitive conditions for local actors to participate in the commons
Main source of financing	Intergovernmental Grants	Intergovernmental Grants

Table 1 above presents the main elements of the Kapodistrias and Kallikrates reforms. Although the Kapodistrias reform (Law 2539/1997) merged 5.755 municipalities and rural communities into 900 larger municipalities and 134 enlarged communities their competences did not expand. The low level of responsibilities local governments had combined with the prefecture system creating a complicated and restrictive bureaucratic environment, thus, the engagement of local actors and their voices was limited (Sofianou et al. 2014). Albeit only a small part of the important responsibilities of the central bodies were transferred to the region, the creation of an intermediate level of power, with an administrative body and decision-making powers on several issues was an important institutional change. The emergence of the region as the new, and only pole of the decentralized system in Greece, also served as an institutional and political counterweight to the state at the regional level,



following the transformation of the state prefecture into a second-tier Local Government, a phenomenon that can be described as decentralized concentration (Petrakos & Psycharis 2004).

The potential of municipalities after the Kapodistrias reform remained limited, their resources were few and their dependence on the region and central state was high. Local authorities do not have fiscal autonomy but are instead financed through a labyrinthine system and there is very little fiscal decentralization (Psycharis et al. 2015). Often local government functions, for many issues, as a branch of the state, dealing with its affairs at the local level, but without ensuring a corresponding transfer of resources and infrastructure (Chortareas & Logothetis 2016).

Kallikrates, however, was a more comprehensive decentralization strategy that restructured the Greek state in favor of local administration (Akrivopoulou et al. 2012). The expansion of local and regional power as well as the subsequent creation of institutional bodies such as the Regional and Municipal Consultation Committees were the two most essential foundations of the reform. Local actors could participate at the local and regional levels by addressing and resolving relevant issues to them. Nevertheless, the statute did not anticipate any improvement in local government funding, and the central government remained the primary promoter throughout the intergovernmental grant procedure (Hazakis & Ioannidis 2014).

The complex web of relations between central administration, decentralization and local government reveals not only how the administration is organized, but also how the Greek political system, which is based on centralized structures, operates. The Greek system of administrative organization is heavily linked to the system of political organization (Petrakos & Psycharis 2004). From 1974 to 2012 (with the small exception of a nine-month-long period in 1988-1989, when unstable coalition governments were formed) Greece was governed by single-party majority governments. The center-right New Democracy (ND) and the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK, a center-left party) alternated in power for nearly four decades (1975-2011). Thus, the Greek political system was a series of rotating governments where the ruling majority exercises power in a 'winner takes all' way, without having to include the opposition (Hlepas & Getimis 2011). The winner of elections used to populate public administration, public bodies and state agencies with political appointees





(Sotiropoulos 1996), which led to a highly politicized bureaucracy (Sotiropoulos 2000; Sotiropoulos 2004; Makrydemetres 2013).

The reliance on pro-government civil servants and mistrust of other civil servants appointed by previous governments created an unusual framework in which ministers, on the one hand, formulated public policies, on the other hand, supported by groups of political appointees, also closely monitored the implementation of policies (Spanou & Sotiropoulos 2010). Hence, even now there is such strong supervision of all levels of administration from the center of government located in Athens that decentralized services of ministries and state agencies (e.g. tax authorities in the periphery of the country and public hospitals.) do not apply any legislation unless they receive very detailed orders, drafted by ministers and their entourage, with very concrete step-by-step instructions on how to interpret and apply legislation. Centralization of decision-making was further enhanced after the financial crisis erupted, as central authorities imposed strict fiscal discipline on sub-national levels of government (Kyvelou & Marava 2017).

Article 101 of the Greek Constitution declares that the state is constitutionally obligated to be organized according to the decentralized system (Panezi 2008), nevertheless the centralized system in Greece remains strong (Petrakos & Psycharis 2004). The central government spends most of the funds, whereas sub-national governments have limited resources and authority (Karanikolas & Hatzipanteli 2010).

In Greece, there are seven decentralized administrations (branches of the central administration in Greece's periphery), 13 regional authorities (founded in 1986 and headed by elected regional governors and councils) and 325 municipalities (created in 2011 by merging 1034 municipalities and headed by mayors and municipal councils). The idea behind the merging of municipalities was the creation of economies of scale that would lower local government expenditures and improve their administrative capacity to better absorb European funding, as small and ill-equipped municipalities were incapable of accessing adequate funding (Kalimeri 2018; Ioannides 2016).

Nevertheless, due to statewide political party competition infiltrating local politics and the reproduction of national political feuds at the sub-national level as a result of Greece's polarized party system, any new theorized administrative capacities were not entirely fulfilled. One of the reasons why the mergers of smaller municipalities into larger municipalities did not always produce the anticipated results was that local government employees typically





lacked official educational credentials and skill levels comparable to those of central government employees (Hlepas 2015, Sotiropoulos 2015).

Except for some policy areas in which implementation is relegated to the municipal level and less often to the regional level, most powers remain in the hands of the central government. In practice, even if sub-national authorities have exclusive powers, they enjoy limited autonomy and discretion (Athanasiadis et al. 2018). The reason for this dependence of the periphery on the center of the Greek state is that almost all tax revenue is raised by the central government. The central government frequently changes the general policies and specific regulations governing center-periphery relations in the Greek administration (Tsekos & Hlepas 2018). As a result, there are few agreements or negotiations between different government levels. Decentralization remains an issue that suffers from a lack of interest from both the political level and the general public (Hlepas 2020; Capano & Lippi 2022)

Most importantly, competences are shared between the central government and sub-national authorities on different policy issues, allowing the central government to have a hand in the daily management of regional and local issues. The dependence on the center for funding is further increased by many local governments overspending by hiring excess administrative personnel, such as temporary employees, in a typical public jobs-for-votes exchange and therefore needing last-minute interventions to cover deficits in municipal budgets or the availability of loans by private and state banks (Hlepas, 2015).

## 5. Measuring decentralization in Italy and Greece

The extent of regional autonomy differs significantly between European countries and often even between regions of the same country depending on the role that the respective national constitution assigns to regions as well as differences in the sense of regional identity (Flanagan et al. 2011; Giordano & Roller 2004). As a tendency, European Member States as part of the idea of 'Europe of Regions' have modified their self-perception in a way that has prompted a restructuring of their governance system, more precisely the devolution of state functions to sub-national levels (Loughlin 2007: 391-393). In the last 30 years, local governance has become a prominent subject of both academic studies and practical policy discussions (Barca 2009), so in order to measure the phenomenon, a wide variety of indexes were developed.



The **Regional Authority Index** (RAI) is one of the main indexes. It is an annual measure of the authority of regional governments in 81 democracies or quasi-democracies over the period 1950-2021. The dataset encompasses subnational government levels with an average population of 150,000 or more. Where appropriate, more than one regional tier is included, whereas regions with a special autonomous statute or asymmetrical arrangements are coded separately. Regional authority is measured along ten dimensions: institutional depth, policy scope, fiscal autonomy, borrowing autonomy, representation, lawmaking, executive control, fiscal control, borrowing control, and constitutional reform. Primary sources (constitutions, legislation, and statutes) are triangulated with secondary literature and consultations with country experts to achieve reliable and valid estimates. A regional data set contains annual scores for regional governments or tiers and a country data set aggregates these scores to the country level with higher values suggesting a greater degree of decentralization (Hooghe et al. 2016; Hooghe et al. 2021).

Figure 1. Greek and Italian RAI scores from 1950 to 2018 (Hooghe et al. 2021)

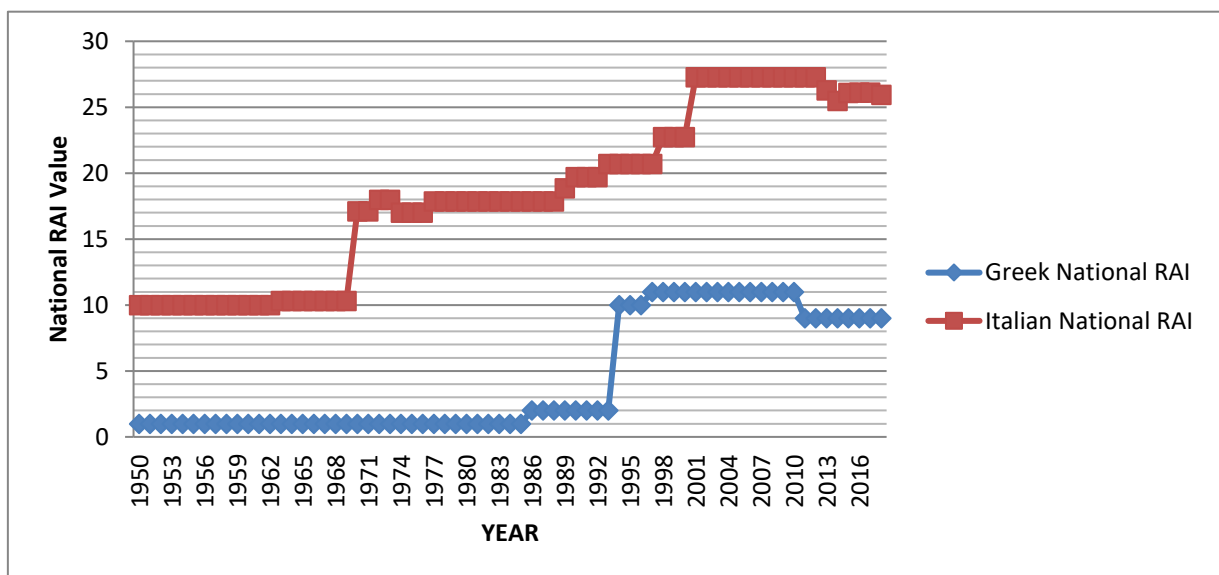


Figure 1 above depicts the evolution of the RAI for Greece and Italy. Greece for most of its history since 1950 exhibits a low degree of Regional Autonomy and a centralized system of governance. Decentralization reforms during the period 1950-2018 were implemented three times: in 1986, 1994, and 1997, while this trend of decentralization was reversed in 2011 when local governments lost their limited borrowing autonomy.



Italy has exhibited a high degree of Regional Autonomy since 1950 when local governments have both fiscal and borrowing autonomy. The main decentralization reforms in Italy during the period 1950-2018 were implemented in 1970 and 2001. Comparing Italy's and Greece's Regional Autonomy Indexes the high level of centralization in Greece becomes even more apparent since Italy's score in 1950 was higher than Greece's in 2018 after the implementation of multiple decentralization reforms. Another difference between the two countries is that Italy's index changes incrementally over the years, many small reforms lead to a change in the score, whereas Greece tends to have a mostly stable RAI that rarely changes. Nevertheless, there is also a similarity between the two indexes: Greece in 2011 and Italy in 2013 exhibited a decrease in their scores.

Figure 2. RAI scores of Italian Ordinary and Special Statute Regions (Hooghe et al. 2021)

### Comparison of Regional Indexes for Ordinary and Special Statute Regions

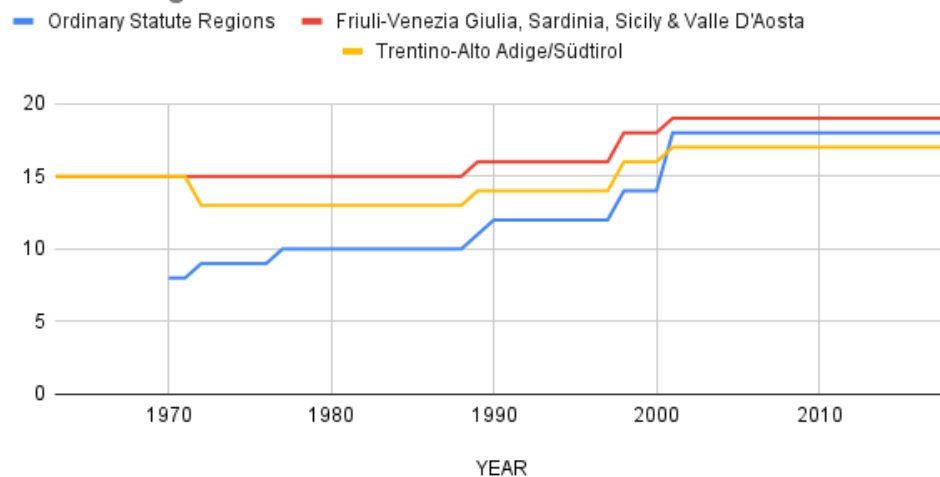


Figure 2 shown above depicts the RAI scores for Ordinary and Special Statute Regions. Italian Special Statute Regions have higher RAI scores, which is in accordance with the legal framework that grants them a greater degree of autonomy.



Figure 3. RAI scores of Greek Prefectures and Regions (Hooghe et al. 2021)

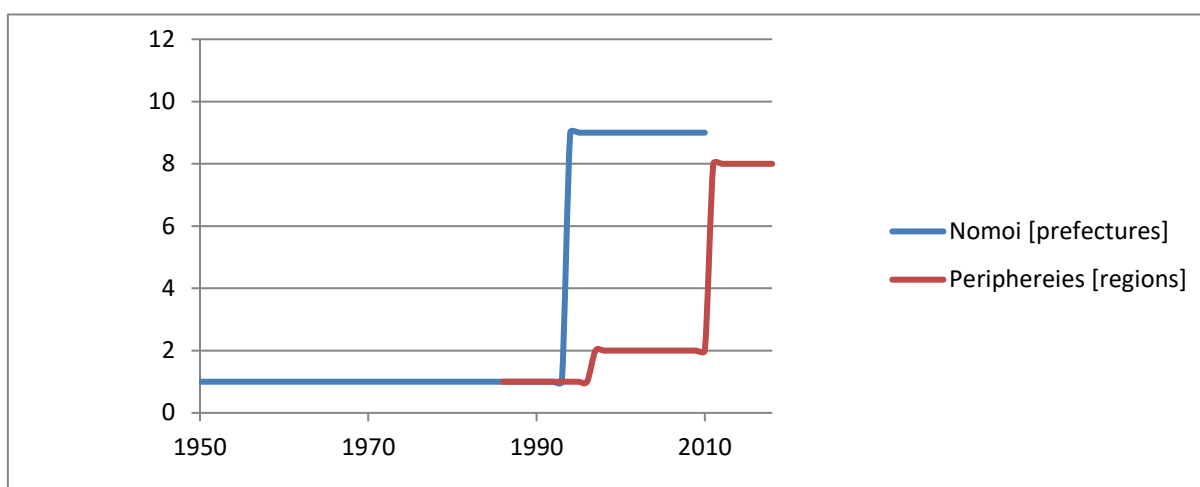


Figure 3 above depicts the RAI scores of Greek Prefectures and Regions. In 1986 regions were introduced and prefectures were abolished in 2011. The Greek Regions have not yet reached the prefecture autonomy peak.

The **Local Autonomy Index** is another methodology for measuring and comparing local autonomy, which was developed for the European Commission. The eleven variables measured are located on seven dimensions and can be combined into a single 'Local Autonomy Index' (LAI). The 11 variables are institutional depth (ID), policy scope (PS), effective political discretion (EPD), fiscal autonomy (FA), the financial transfer system (FTS), financial self-reliance (FSR), borrowing autonomy (BA), organizational autonomy (OA), legal protection (LP), administrative supervision (AS) and central or regional access (CRA). The former eight variables are subsumed under the term self-rule (SR), and the latter three under the term interactive rule (IR). The two variables (PS and EPD) consist of 12 components (Ladner et al.2015).

More in-depth the seven dimensions outlined by the Ladner et al. (2015) report are as follows:

1. *Legal Autonomy* measures the range to which the existence of municipalities is constitutionally safeguarded, and whether the central government can amalgamate municipalities against the wishes.
2. *Policy scope*, the extent of services that are a responsibility of a municipality.
3. *Political discretion*, the power of the municipality to decide how to fulfill the tasks they are charged with.

4. *Financial autonomy* examines the degree to which municipalities have their own financial resources, collect taxes, and borrow money.
5. *Organizational autonomy* explores whether a municipality can organize and staff their administration working within the bounds of their political system.
6. *Non-interference* is tied to relations with the central government and consists of the method in which local authorities are supervised and organized and whether financial transfers are unconditionally granted.
7. *Access* captures whether local authorities can influence higher-level decisions.

Figure 4. LAI for European Countries (Ladner et al. 2015)

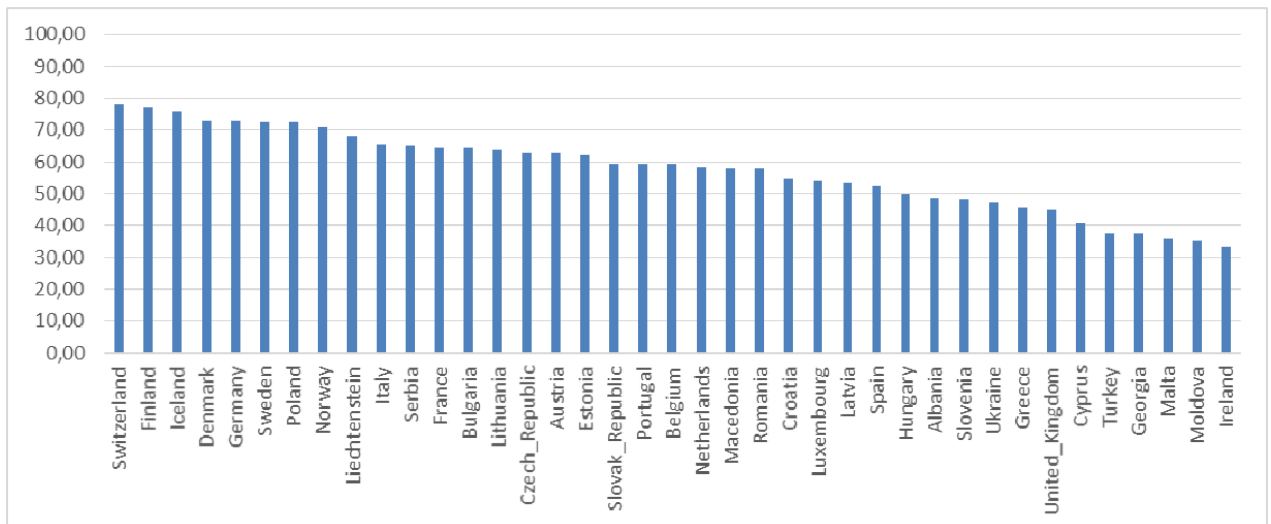


Figure 4 shown above is the LAI for European countries. The European Commission's report in 2015 (p. 72) groups Italy with the countries where municipalities have a medium-high degree of autonomy (index values between 60 and 70): Liechtenstein, Serbia, France, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Austria and Estonia; while Greece is in a group of countries with a medium-low degree of autonomy (values between 40 and 50) together with: Hungary, Albania, Slovenia, Ukraine and the United Kingdom.

Table 2. LAI Scores in 1990 and 2014 for Greece and Italy (Ladner et al. 2015)

Country	LAI 1990	LAI 2014	Changes
Italy	51.1	68.2	17.1
Greece	41.5	47.9	6.4



Table 2 above shows the evolution of the LAI score for Greece and Italy. Higher values signify greater local autonomy. The LAI changes from 1990 to 2014 manifest an increase in decentralization in both Greece and Italy, nonetheless the extent is quite different. Italy increased from 51.1 to 68.2 whereas Greece increased only from 41.5 to 47.9. Similar to the RAI changes we notice that Greece remained at a lower level in 2014 than Italy's starting point in 1990.

Regional Autonomy Indexes albeit more limited in scope were developed by the OECD (Blöchliger & King 2006), which focuses on fiscal autonomy and the role of decentralization in taxation. Blöchliger and King's (2006) research found that Italy in 2002 had a taxing power of subcentral governments of 16.4% (tax revenue as a percentage of total tax revenues), while in Greece the percentage was only 0.9%. The OECD study, despite the limited scope of the variables examined, aligns with other indexes showing Italy as a medium-high decentralized country, while Greece is in the lower end of the spectrum.

In 2009 the Assembly of European Regions AER commissioned BAK Basel Economics for a detailed indicator-based analysis of decentralization in Europe. BAK Basel Economics conceived a **Decentralization Index** for the European Member States based on similar regions within a country and analyzed the correlation between decentralization and economic development. In the framework of comprehensive and multi-level proceedings, BAK Basel Economics developed a decentralization index through a successive merging procedure out of more than 200 qualitative and quantitative indicators. Separated into two main groups of decision and financial decentralization indicators, the index illustrates the general degree of political powers devolved to the regional tier within this country (AER 2009: 9; AER 2009b:10-11).





Table 3. Italian Decentralization Index (AER, 2009b: 65)

Sub-Indexes	Weight in %	Italy	European Average	Difference	Rank
Administrative	12	51	47	4	12
Functional	25	50	39	11	6
-thereof decision making	16.8	46	33	13	5
-thereof implementing	6.3	61	66	-5	17
-thereof territorial (not indicated)	1.9	-	-	-	-
Political	20	57	49	8	8
Vertical	3	52	43	9	8
Financial	40	50	47	3	7
-thereof qualitative	15	40	47	-7	18
-thereof quantitative	25	56	46	10	7
<b>Decentralization Index</b>	$\Sigma 100$	52	45	7	6

Table 3 above presents the calculated decentralization values for Italy. Higher values suggest greater decentralization. Having a score of 52 in the Decentralization Index Italy ranks sixth compared to the other countries researched by BAK. The Decentralization Index and its sub-indexes are the weighted averages of the regions with a normal status and the five autonomous regions. Italy has high scores in Functional (50, rank 6), Political (57, rank 8) and Financial Decentralization (50, rank 7). The report argues that Italy's high score in Functional Decentralization is due to the decision-making power being equally distributed among the different tiers in various policy fields (AER 2009b: 65). More implementing power lies with regions than with national and sub-regional tiers. In the case of Political Decentralization, several factors contribute to the high result: the regional tier is politically relatively autonomous, for example, the national tier has no power to overrule regional decisions. In turn, regions cannot block national legislation or decision-making. Nevertheless, it is possible to intervene if the national tier does not act in accordance with regional constitution or law. In the case of Financial Decentralization, the seventh rank is mainly due to the quantitative sub-indicators. In terms of income the regional shares of tax revenue (over 40%), grants (over 90%) and fees (over 90%) are high. On the expenditure side, public consumption is around 60% and public investment is near 80% (AER2009b: 65).



The following figure 5 displays the comparison between Italian decentralization and the European average.

Figure 5. Radar Graph of the Italian and European Average Decentralization Indexes (based on data from AER, 2009: 65)



Table 4. Greek Decentralization Index (AER, 2009b, p. 61)

Sub-Indexes	Weight in %	Greece	European Average	Difference	Rank
Administrative	12	17	47	-30	24
Functional	25	37	39	-2	16
-thereof decision making	16.8	25	33	-8	18
-thereof implementing	6.3	98	66	32	1
-thereof territorial (not indicated)	1.9	-	-	-	-
Political	20	30	49	-19	24
Vertical	3	62	43	19	2
Financial	40	31	47	-16	25
-thereof qualitative	15	52	47	5	8
-thereof quantitative	25	18	46	-28	26
<b>Decentralization Index</b>	$\Sigma 100$	31	45	-14	24



Table 4 presented above indicates the Greek decentralization values. Greece achieved a score of only 31 in the Decentralization Index and was ranked third last in the country comparison, above Estonia and Bulgaria. The two main factors determining Greece's score are Political (30) and Financial Decentralization (31), this is due to both sub-indexes being highly weighted and hence an important factor on the final Decentralization Index. The report proposes that three factors reduce political autonomy in Greek regions. First, the national legislative body comprises only one chamber. Without a second chamber that represents the regions, the political influence of the regional tier on the national tier is therefore quite low. Second, regions have no constitutions. Third, although the regions have executive and judiciary bodies, a legislative body is missing (AER, 2009b: 61). Nevertheless, within Financial Decentralization the score for the qualitative sub-indicators is quite high (52, rank 8) because of a well-established per equation system. By contrast, the score for the quantitative sub-indicators was rather low (18, rank 26). Additionally, Greece has a very low score in Administrative Decentralization (17) in combination with a considerable mismatch between decision making (25) and implementing power (98).

Figure 6 below depicts the comparison between Greece and European average decentralization.

Figure 6. Radar Graph of the Greek and European Average Decentralization Indexes (based on data from AER, 2009b: 61)





Baier et al. (2013: 13-14) propose a system to examine regional autonomy based on indicators that emphasize differences between regions of the same country which are more explicitly related to regional competencies relevant to regional innovation policymaking. To assess the degree of regional autonomy, a variety of documents were reviewed and translated into a ranking on general Likert Scales (i.e. a unidimensional scale that researchers use to collect respondents' attitudes and opinions) of either one to five or one to three.

Thus, Baier et al. (2013: 14-15) take into consideration the following three aspects:

1. General Regional Autonomy, as defined by each country's constitution; with the value '1' being assigned to regions in a fully centralized country without regional parliament; '2' to regions in a dominantly centralized context (e.g. regional representatives assigned centrally); '3' to a shared central/ regional structure (centrally appointed representatives plus regionally elected representatives); '4' to dominantly regionalized contexts with regionally elected representatives; and '5' to regions with regionally elected governments that have wide-ranging competencies and representations in other countries
2. Regional competencies concerning innovation policy; this variable was transferred on a three-point Likert Scale with '1' indicating full centralization of RTDI (i.e. Research, Technological Development, and Innovation) policies, i.e. neither legislative nor administrative competencies for such policies on the regional level; '2' indicating dominantly centralized RTDI policy governance, i.e. most legislative competences remain at the national level except in some areas; and '3' indicating a wide range of regional competencies in RTDI policies
3. Regional influence on priority setting in the allocation of ERDF funding; calculated as the average of two indicators which are: the *administrative perspective* (all countries in which just one regional authority was involved in structural planning funding received a score of '2' whereas all countries in which just one national authority was involved received a score of '4'. All others were assigned a score of '3') and the *programming perspective* (the Likert scale was calculated based on the share of the budget allocated by national and regional operational programmers respectively).

The results of this methodology for Greece and Italy are presented in the following table

5:



Table 5. Indicators of Regional Autonomy according to Baier et. al (2013:16)

Member State	General Regional Autonomy	Competences with regard to Innovation Policy	Influence on Structural Fund Allocations	Regional Level of Reference (NUTS) (first level under central government)
Greece	3	1	2	NUTS 2, regions/periferieies
Italy (average)	4	2	3.5	NUTS 2 regions, Regions/regioni
Italy (more autonomous)	5	3	3.5	NUTS 2 regions, regions/regioni <i>Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, Val d'Aosta, Trentino-Alto Adige/ Südtirol, Sardinia &amp; Sicily</i>

Similar to previous regional autonomy indexes Italy has a higher degree of general autonomy than Greece, but regions also exhibit more competences with regard to innovation policy and have more influence on structural fund allocation.

## 6. Conclusion

Although Italy and Greece are countries that are often grouped together in public policy, a comparison of decentralization indexes depicts a significant difference between the two. Italy is above the European Union average decentralized country, while Greece remains one of the most unitary and centralized countries in the Union. The literature suggests a small federalizing trend in Italy with some political pressure in that direction, while such trends are nonexistent in Greece.

Decentralized authority in Greece remains weak, with local authorities lacking the ability to pass laws and with the institution of the region lacking constitutions. Combined with the lack of resources Greek decentralized authorities are dependent on the center and lack the capacity to implement their own policies, unlike Italy where the regions and municipalities have been granted more competences and political freedom.

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## Notes

- I. Italy, Greece, Spain and Portugal
- II. Faguet (1997, p. 2) asserts that: 'Arguments for and against decentralization frequently assume the character of sweeping, cross-disciplinary claims about the effects of administrative measures on the quality and efficiency of both government and social interaction [...]. Writers on decentralization, whose work more often than not consists of reports on past, or advocacy for future, reform, seldom specify the mechanisms by which favorable changes are meant to occur, and often fail to isolate the variables involved in a way which is both satisfactory and consistent'.
- III. See Schragger, R. C. (2010). *DECENTRALIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT*. Virginia Law Review, 96(8), 1837–1910. for an analysis of the intersection between decentralization, economics and legal geography. See also Smith, B.C. (1985). *Decentralization: The Territorial Dimension of the State* (1st ed.). Routledge. for an analytical framework for the comparative study of decentralization in contemporary systems of government.
- IV. *Trasformismo* is the blurring of ideological distinction, with deputies of both left and right parties switching sides to pave the way for the succession of different governments. This practice meant that coalitions were unstable and no real political alternation took place (Brunazzo & Della Sala, 2016).
- V. 'First Republic' is the term by which many historians now designate the first decades of the life of our republic, from the coming into force of the Constitution (1948) to the advent of new political forces and institutional reforms marking the birth of the 'second republic' (from '94 to the present) (Bogaards, 2005).

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