Overview of Administrative Reform and Implementation in Italy:
Organization, Personnel, Procedures and Delivery of Public Services

by Franco Bassanini

(published in *International Journal of Public Administration*, Volume 23 Issue 2 & 3 2000, pp. 229-252)

In the early nineties Italy as well as many industrialized countries embarked on wide governmental reform. Their reasons were similar. The need to cut the budget deficit was an imperative[1]. All countries needed also to restore citizens' trust in the institutions and in government in particular. The burden of taxation and the quality of public services were unaligned or at least were perceived to be so. Reform in each country had its own features according to the characteristics of its institutional system and to the departure conditions.

In Italy, more than in other countries, administrative reform goes together with constitutional reform. Institutional innovations are necessary to ensure stability, legitimization and decisional power of Government institutions. Beside, the need to modernize the public administration is perhaps more pressing than elsewhere. The macrostructure of government needs reforming while its strategic mission has to be reviewed. The whole administrative culture must change. Rules and procedures need to be simplified. The bureaucratic burdens on individuals and businesses have to be reduced. The public administration need focusing on results and not on processes.

Therefore additional innovations are needed to create a more decentralized government, an administration no longer ham-strung by red-tape, more open to the market and to civil society. A government that does less but does it better while fostering opportunities rather than producing goods and services directly. A government that favors businesses rather than imposing unnecessary constraints. A government that sets modern rules for the market rather than protecting public and private monopolies.

Since the year 1990 important innovations have been adopted in Italy. Laws 142 of 1990 and 81 of 1993 introducing the direct election of mayors and presidents of the provinces brought stability, legitimization and a modern set-up to local government. Law 241 of 1990 was enacted to bring greater transparency and accountability to administrative procedure and to streamline processes. With Decree 29 of 1993 the reform of the status of civil servants began, the concept of the separation of policy-making and administration was established and the premises for introducing private

[1] This led to setup policies designed to make structural changes in the administrative mechanisms responsible for swelling public spending as an important component of fiscal adjustment strategies

sector management features into public administration were laid.

In the last two years the Prodi Cabinet has drawn up a comprehensive government reform and modernization plan which aims at developing these innovations, widening their impact and eliminating some of the manifest limitations. This plan deals more courageously and with greater determination with the difficult issue of rethinking the whole Italian administrative system. its institutional architecture, its mission, its rules, its organizational and management models, the patterns of behavior of its managers and employees and its way of dealing with individual citizens and businesses.

The aims underlying the reform program have much in common with other's country reforms and in particular with the Clinton-Gore program for reinventing the Federal Government in the United States started in 1993. In both cases reducing the size of the public administration is a key goal Relations between the different levels of Government and between public and private sectors need to be changed. Offices must be organized and operate in a different way. They must be result-oriented rather than process-oriented to make their actions more effective and less costly. Staff has to be more accountable for their actions. The administration has to serve its "customers" better, improving the quality of the services it provides, getting rid of useless and burdensome formalities imposed on individuals and businesses. In charting the reform, it is important to seek dialogue, the participation and the cooperation of the members of the public administration, of the parties involved, of organizations representing the business world, workers, consumers and of the scientific community.

Nevertheless, although the goals are similar in the US and in Italy, they are pursued in quite a different way.

1. Reshaping the government macrostructure.

In Italy the reform is radically changing the macrostructure of government. This is a major difference with the reform in the USA the scope of which is more limited. The National Performance Review refers only to the federal Government while in Italy reform involves the whole administrative system from the national to the regional and local governments, the school system, universities and health care agencies.

One of the main features of the Italian reform is the decentralization of state functions and activities to the local levels, 20 years after the first provisions for regionalization in the seventies.

When constitutional review presently in the hands of Parliament will be complete,

Italy will probably have a federal system. In the meantime a radical change in the distribution of powers (administrative functions and tasks) among the central, regional and local governments, has been started under the provisions of the Law 59 of 1997 (the law so-called Bassanini First).

As a first step, powers and tasks that will remain under the jurisdiction of the central Government have been identified. After that, the functions and tasks to be devolved to the Regions and local Governments have been determined by exercising the delegation of legislative functions. With the decentralization of functions relevant to the local interests and to the development of regional-and local communities, jurisdictional fragmentation in the administrative decision making will be drastically reduced. Decisions concerning the provision of public goods and services will be now taken at the government level which is in the best position to match people's needs, according to the principle of subsidiarity.

The current devolution process is completely new as compared with what happened in the seventies. In the earlier case, the central government waived its jurisdiction over certain specified functions that were transferred to the Regional Councils. Law 59 of 1997 instead established as a general principle that the Regions and local Councils will take over all functions hitherto carried out by the State, except for those specifically stated and for which the central government will retain its jurisdiction.

The Executive was given a wide delegation by the Parliament in order to implement the devolution process designed by law 59 of 1997. The principles on which the legislative decrees for the implementation of this law not only include the principle of "subsidiarity". The principles of "wholeness", of "efficiency and economy of "cooperation", of "responsibility and uniqueness of the administration", of "uniformity" of "autonomy of local governments" and finally the principle of "adequacy" are also included.

The principle of "wholeness" implies the need to assign to the Regions planning and administrative tasks and functions not assigned to the central government. The principle of "efficiency and economy", means that tasks and functions that have become superfluous should be abolished. The principle of "cooperation" amongst central government, regions and local authorities, also to ensure sufficient participation in European Union initiatives. The principle of "responsibility and uniqueness of the administration" is consistent with the need to identify the one and only entity responsible for each service or administrative activity. The principle of "uniformity" implies that government entities must be able to carry out functions which are interrelated. The principle of "autonomy of local governments" is essential for the exercise of the administrative functions assigned to them. Finally the principle

of "adequacy" implies that functions must be assigned to the administrative body able to exercise them.

But a more decentralized government should not mean a fragmented, disjointed administration. Link mechanisms between the various Government levels have been created to ensure cooperation and working together in the performance of certain functions. This need is even felt in a country with a long federal tradition like the United States where partnerships between the federal Government, local governments and non-profit organizations can be set up, as outlined in the NPR, to ensure the effectiveness of many policies.

In Italy we have even gone beyond decentralization, identifying those functions that are now obsolete, and others that can be carried out more effectively and especially more efficiently by the private sector. The government size will be reduced while it will concentrate on its "core business". In particular the central Government will focus on relations with the European Union, on national policy objectives (in agriculture, labor market services, public housing, public works, business policies and training , for example), on the definition of common standards and on "substitutive" power to be exercised when Regions do not fulfill their obligations (as is the case for transportation, electric power, mining, land management and environmental policies).

The era of "big government" is over - not only in the United States as is stated in the fourth National Performance Review report presented in 1996 by Vice-President Al Gore - but in our country as well. There is however an important difference. The NPR views the government downsizing only as staff cuts. Objectives focused on large cuts but functions performed by the federal Government were not questioned. Down-sizing was supposed to result from streamlining internal management, flattening the organization and reducing support positions. It was only later, under pressure from Congress, that the NPR considered cutting some of the federal programs. It is a controversial issue if these cuts were actually made and if action was not limited to merging federal programs. This is one of the shortcomings the NPR is considered to have in the United States.

Our rationalization program has been correctly approached. Down-sizing should result from the whole review of government tasks and functions. However in the last years the public wage bill dropped significantly from 12.7% of GDP in 1992 to 11.25% in 1997 and it is planned to go down further to 10.24% in 2001.

There is yet another difference, related to the one just mentioned. The central government structure, will be completely reshaped. The number of ministries will be reduced. The new ministries will have an organizational set-up better suited to their

own mission. The Executive can now make this kind of decision through its own regulations without involving the Parliament any more. The "one size fits all" will no more apply to the organization of Ministries. The traditional government structure divided into ministries which was established by Cavour in 1853, has certainly run its course and is under fire as is the very principle of unity of Italy. In recent decades a fragmentation of the public powers has occurred and is considered one of the most important problems of our administrative system.

The traditional administrative model is no longer adequate to deal with modern society needs. In reshaping the central government, it is now possible to choose among different organization models (agencies, departments, independent regulatory agencies, etc) consistent with the functions to be carried out. In this process the central government structure will also be simplified and streamlined, through the abolition and merging of ministries. Also the restructuring of the Prime Minister's Cabinet Office is an extremely important feature of the reform. With it constitutional provisions relating to Prime Minister's guidance and coordination function will be fully implemented.

In our case the whole administrative system is being entirely redesigned, while in the case of the NPR restructuring has only been internal. The overall set-up of the federal administration is not questioned. In both cases however, the aim is to have a government more responsive to user needs, providing better services and also being more efficient while concentrating on results and no longer on compliance. In Italy other parts of the reform contribute to the achievement of this goal.

2. Reforming the personnel system.

Greater efficiency will eventually result from the new private-sector-type contracts for civil servants, from giving managers actual responsibility, from budget reform, from the implementation of the new financial planning and control systems, from the introduction of performance evaluation mechanisms and parameters, and from decentralized and individual bargaining mechanisms which will affect positively innovation, efficiency and productivity in administrative bodies. Now that managers can be removed, that performance based_ remuneration and accountability have been introduced, that the distinction between policy-setting responsibility and management responsibility has been strengthened, the urge to innovate should be strong.

In 1993 the process of changing the status of civil servants (so-called "privatization")

got off to a start[2]. The completion of this process, will mean that the special statute government employees have enjoyed up to now will go out of effect for most of them. This statute was based on administrative law rather than on labor contract and has been subject only to the jurisdiction of an administrative court. The completion of the "privatization" and the handing over of jurisdiction to civil courts is an important step forward. However, it is only a tool for achieving a much wider goal improving the efficiency of the administrative apparatus by adopting a private sector model in labor management.

In defining new competencies, responsibilities and powers of the main political actors (national ministers, mayors, local government councilors; chairmen and boards of directors of public bodies, etc.), of managers and civil servants in general, of the trade unions who represent them at the national and local levels, the reform draws on a management model borrowed from private enterprise. This is a radically new approach which has five main characteristics[3].

The first characteristic refers to the separation of policy-setting powers and management responsibilities. Separation, already indicated in legislative decree 29 of 1993, was couched in such terms as to make it practically ineffective. The principle of distinguishing between the political and administrative role is now made effective by the reform. On one hand, the competencies of political bodies are clearly defined. These have the power of defining the aims and programs, allocating resources, monitoring performance and results, appointing managers to carry out specific jobs and revoking appointments should they prove ineffective.

Managers on the other hand, are entrusted with all responsibility for management including the power to adopt administrative measures not reserved for political bodies. In the past, a ministry or other government entity was directed by political head and the managers belonging to it were bound in a tiered system. Even after the reform introduced by legislative decree 29 of 1993, the political head (minister, mayor or director of a public body) retained considerable power in administrative activity and continued to interfere. Such interference has now been eliminated.

The second characteristic focuses on the responsibilities of managers and the non-permanency of appointments. The reform states that also the employment of top managers is regulated by contract and general labor legislation. A new model for

[2] This was in compliance with law 421 of 1992 and legislative decree 29 of 1993.

[3] See legislative decrees 396 of 1997 and 80 of 1998, passed on the basis of art. 11, sub-paragraph 4 of law 59 of 1997, delegating the Government to legislate

selecting, appointing and employing top public managers of the central government has been introduced. This will be a reference point for all the public administration.

Central government managers form a "corp" separated from any of the ministries or organizations to which they are assigned. Access to the management level of the central government is through public competition only. A training program is often an integral part of the recruitment procedure. Previously instead, top-level managers in central government were political appointees and could be chosen from among the ranks of career civil servants or from outside the Civil Service. Once appointed they enjoyed the same permanency as career civil servants. Under the reform, well qualified professional outsiders can be hired under term contracts to run high-level central government offices[4], up to 5% of total top level managers. Appointments to managerial positions are now all based on term contracts for a duration of not less than two and not more than seven years and are renewable.

A limited number of key positions can be renewed even before the expiry date if a new government takes office after a general election. The remuneration of managers is determined by collective agreement. However, a substantial amount of the remuneration can be related to position and performance and it is subject to individual negotiation. For top managerial jobs the share of the salary related to the performance will be even higher. Individual contracts can also be negotiated .

Managers can be removed only when poor performance emerges from assessment. If removal involves not only the transfer but also some kind of sanction (exclusion from appointments at that level for at least two years, or in more serious cases, dismissal), and not just transfer the advice of a commission of guarantors, which includes an elected representative of senior managers, is required.

The third characteristic implies that senior managers act as private-sector employers. This relies on the "delegislation" of organizational acts concerning human resources and the extension of legislation on flexible forms of labor. Making managers accountable for their results implies removing the constraints imposed by administrative law over the management of human resources. The reform embodies the principle that managers responsible for running an office or department do so with "capabilities and powers proper to the private sector managers".

Before the reform the management of human resources was largely subject to the dictates of administrative law. Hence, any organizational measure adopted by a public

[4] The hiring of managers, even top-level ones like City manager, under a term contract is governed by law 127 of 1997 for city governments and by some regional laws

manager could be contested by his staff for reasons of legitimacy in the same way as an administrative provision. Through the control, according to ultra vires doctrine, an administrative court could make judgments regarding the organizational decisions of the manager imposing its own legalistic viewpoint on the administration. As a result managers were unempowered, discouraged from innovating and prevented from fostering performance-oriented behaviors.

If a private enterprise management model is to be adopted, public employers must act like private sector employers as far as their decisions over work organization are concerned. With the reform, then, all legislation applying to private enterprise which allows for flexible forms of hiring and employment (term contracts, training contracts, temporary employment) can be extended to the public administration. Promotional campaigns encourage part-time work and teleworking.

Relocation of workers from one government agency to another, either on a voluntary basis or because of over-staffing, is governed by the same regulations as it is in private enterprise. This constitutes a sharp break with the past. The concept of public employment as a life-long guaranteed "status", synonymous with impossible to remove, disappears. Government agencies are acquiring the legal instruments which allow them to make use of flexible forms of employment and to deal with over-staffing which may stem from the reorganization processes.

As the fourth characteristic, a system of collective bargaining aimed at reconciling the independence of the different government agencies with constraints imposed by the economic and financial policy objectives of the central government, has been set up. With the reform the system of collective bargaining in the public administration is being adjusted according to the radical decentralization of administrative functions from central to local governments and the increased autonomy of all public bodies and agencies. Contracts are now negotiated at two levels. First come the national collective agreements which concern the different sectors (ministries; regional and city governments; schools; health care agencies; State enterprises; universities; research institutes etc.). A second level of negotiation can take place in each body setting additional benefits which must be consistent with the guidelines established in sector-level contracts .

At the national level, a technical agency (A.R.A.N) represents the government agency in collective bargaining. It operates on the basis of input received from sector boards ("comitati di settore") set up directly by the administration within each collective bargaining sector. Before signing the collective contracts, A.r.a.n, must have a green light from the sector board involved and obtain approval from the Court of Auditors to ensure that the costs of the collective contract have been calculated correctly and

that the increase in pay is consistent with the Executive's financial target objectives as outlined in the economic and financial plan. In each administrative body it is part of the managers' job to negotiate additional pay and conditions, within the framework of the targets and resources decided by the political body

The reform also introduces new rules to check representativeness of trade unions. In the public sector, the unionization rate is fairly high (an average of more than 50%) but it is abnormally fragmented. The reform aims at fostering certainty, stability and consistency in trade union representation, encouraging rather than imposing negotiating procedures where the union spokesmen at the various levels are actually representative of, and accountable to, their members. In each government agency a single body representing personnel is elected from a list of candidates presented by the trade union associations.

During negotiations for additional pay, this elected body is flanked by union representatives, signatories of the national collective agreements. At the national level, only trade unions with representativeness not lower than 5% are admitted to the bargaining table. The representativeness is calculated as the average of two parameters: the share of membership out of total union membership for the sector involved in the collective agreement and the percentage of votes out of the total votes cast for all lists in the same sector. A sufficient degree of representativeness is also required to settle a national contract (which all the public administration must honor). Before signing an agreement A.r.a.n. must ensure that the unions involved represent together no less than an average of 51%, or at least no less than 60% of the votes.

3. Reviewing regulations and the administrative decision making

Over time the functions of the public administration were translated into a proliferation of required procedural formalities, often leading, to the setting up of additional bodies and offices to carry them out. An excessive number of laws regulating this large production of administrative acts and competencies, generated disputes, structural rigidities and uncertainty as to rights.

In Italy the administrative decision-making is over-regulated. It is mostly regulated by primary legislation and regulation is usually over-prescriptive. Such administrative decision making is rigid, slow and inefficient. It places unnecessary costs on citizens and businesses. According to a survey carried out on the Italian businesses in 1996 compliance costs due to administrative burdens are estimated to amount to 1,2 percent of GDP.

The improvement of administrative decision making as well as a better quality of regulations are central objectives in the program for reforming government. These will be achieved according to three principles: delegislation, simplification and codification.

"Delegislation" is the shifting from primary to secondary legislation in disciplining certain matters, to make procedures less rigid. Simplification is eliminating unnecessary procedural steps to serve users more quickly and cut public administration costs. Codification is establishing a unified, consistent set of regulations

"Delegislation" basically involves the transfer of legislative power, that is, the authority to make "rules of law" to the "rule of regulations" (a shift from primary legislation to secondary legislation and other forms of independent rule setting). This means rules are more flexible and makes the Executive politically accountable for the "delegislated" sector.

Law 59 of 1997 is a turning point in the process of "delegislation" and simplification. The technique used for identifying the subject of "delegislation" is that of indicating procedures to be simplified. Procedures are generally contained in annexes to legal texts but are nevertheless an integral part of them. The subject of "delegislation" does not correspond therefore to a specific subject. Therefore, "delegislation" is automatically limited by the subject of it.

Law 59 also states that from the moment the new regulation goes into effect norms and laws regulating procedures are abolished. This provision is in keeping with the theory that assigns to a law, but not to a regulation, the power to downgrade primary legislation: the effect of "delegislation" concerns the subject of delegislation and not individual laws. It is necessary and sufficient that regulating power be exercised within the context of "delegislation". If that is so, then the regulation really will effect repeal but that is what the direct effect is.

Regulations should conform to the following criteria and principles: simplification of administrative procedures to cut the number of procedural steps, the number of administrative bodies involved, provisions for concerted action and agreements; the shortening of terms for carrying out procedures, uniform regulations for procedures of the same type carried out in different ministries and public bodies; reduction of the number of procedures and the grouping of procedures of the same kind; transfer of decision-making from decision-making bodies to monocratic bodies or individual managers.

Any simplification project should be inspired above all by the criteria of the rational grouping of administrative procedures. This should put a halt to the present dispersion of competencies and the constant proliferation of bodies and offices with decision-making powers, making it possible for the State to deliver faster, more efficient services which are in fact useful to the user-citizen. Usefulness, and not unduly protected public interest should become the real yardstick of any administrative procedure according to effective reform logic.

Regulations are issued by decree of the President of the Republic, based on decisions taken by the Executive, proposed by the Prime Minister, the Department for Public Administration, in cooperation with the Minister whose jurisdiction the matter concerns, after consultation with the Parliamentary Committees involved and with the Council of State. To this end when necessary, the Prime Minister convenes meetings among the ministries and departments involved and does so upon request from a minister involved in a matter. Thirty days after request for the opinion of the Committees regulations can be enacted.

With Law 59 of 1997 "delegislation" of procedure becomes "ordinary" in the sense that the simplification mechanism has become on-going. Each year the Government must present a bill to Parliament to further streamline procedures and must report on its previous assignment to the Houses.

The tool of an annual simplification bill based on EU law means the simplification and delegislation model is constantly being refashioned to make it more responsive to present needs. In other words it is a yearly check-up on the criteria and the implementation features of simplification considering the impact on the economic world, any new demands from the social partners and the connection with parallel legislation. In delegating functions and reassigning competencies, it ispossible that the original aim set when the implementation regulations were drafted has now become obsolete.

Making sure that the underlying principles and criteria are still valid and not out-of-date ensures that simplification process remains dynamic and concrete and prevents the fossilization of outmoded criteria. This makes it possible for all the parties directly or indirectly involved in administrative procedures to update the list of procedures that need correcting, adding the new areas needing attention.

Thanks to these innovations, businesses can now count on simplified procedures for setting up new industrial plants. In this area Italy is far ahead of many other countries. Our one-stop shops not only give information but they will soon be able to issue all the authorizations required. This will speed up and streamline decision-making

through mechanisms like "conferenza di servizi" (a pool of representatives of the different bodies whose authorizations are required so decisions can be made by a single body). Others are "silent consent", and the setting of a term for final decisions regarding applications or authorizations - 60 day maximum for less complex cases. The one-stop shops will be able to assist businesses using information technologies and in particular will be linked to the Internet, granting easy access to information for the interested parties regarding the decisions that affect them.

Relevant initiatives have been implemented in order to reduce burdens also on citizens. Simplifications concerning many certificates have been introduced (i.e. birth and death certificates have not anymore an expiring date) and the use of self-declarations instead has been considerably widened.

4 Improving government responsiveness to citizens and the quality of public services

Making public administration more outward-looking and delivering better quality services while curbing costs is the goal of the whole reform. Specific initiatives have been also undertaken in order to increase the participation and empowerment of citizens, improve the quality of public services and government responsiveness to citizens. They focuses on issues such 'as: setting of service standards to be measured against performance, consultation of the public, complaints and redress procedures, transparency and accessibility of public services, dissemination of best practices and the use of information technology in the delivery of public services.

An improved relationship between citizens and government is also the objective of other initiatives undertaken within the same framework of reform and namely those related to the deregulation and the streamlining of administrative decision making and the reduction of administrative burdens on citizens and business described in previous sections.

A specific policy for the setting of quality standards was set up in 1994, by a Prime Minister directive. This is called the "Public Service Charter". By this policy public services must be delivered according to a set of general principles. Some of them such as equality and impartiality were already stated in the national Constitution. The Public Service Charter creates a new framework in which these principles are grouped together with newer ones such as the continuity and regularity principles, openness, choice, courtesy and helpfulness, consultation and value for money. According to the Public Service Charter, the service delivery must be based on standards and targets to be measured against actual performance. Consultation of citizens through periodical

customer satisfaction surveys must be carried out. The results of these surveys must be taken into account in the decision making process. Complaints as well as reimbursement and remedy procedures must be provided. Individual "services charters" issued by government agencies must indicate the standard in relation to which a reimbursement procedure is set up.

This policy applies to all government agencies at central and local level as well as to Public Utilities. Since 1995 sector based guidelines were provided for health care, schools, gas, electricity, post offices, pension services (transportation, customs, and water supply are under preparation) in order to help the implementation of this policy. The Department of public administration coordinates the issuing of sectors guidelines while an independent committee provides for the assessment of the implementation process of this policy. By June 1997, almost 7000 government agencies including those delivering gas, electricity, mail, health care, school and pensions services adopted their own service charter. Health-care, gas and electricity are the sectors in which the Charter is more widespread. Both schools and health-care agencies have so far found difficulties in setting up quality standards for their services.

The Public Service Charter policy is characterized by four elements. First of all, there is a plurality of charters in each sector rather than a single national charter. Each agency has to define and adopt its specific service charter in accordance with the Prime Minister directive's principles and sectors guidelines: Secondly, there are no national standards. Each agency sets its own standards based on the quality indicators defined at national level. Thirdly, the performance review process is decentralized. It is based on checks by clients through complaints and consultation. Agencies are expected to report annually to a central body on their standards, targets and performance. Fourth, mechanisms with an impact on managerial accountability have been established. Complaints by clients must be submitted to the bodies in charge of the internal audit. These bodies are also required to monitor quality services performance against standards as an input to be considered while assessing manager performance.

Clear communication to the public is a pre-requirement of a more transparent and accountable government. In order to achieve an intelligible and unambiguous communication to citizens by government agencies a program has been set up. Under this program a "Codice di Stile" was prepared providing both managers and employees with general guidelines to be followed in order to improve their written communication. Subsequently, a "Manuale di stile" was prepared as a practical tool for employees involved in written communication. Its criteria are consistent with those set out in the Codice di stile. These are simplicity, intelligibility, functional restrictions, help and support. According to the simplicity criterion, words of common and

consolidated use, words of Italian origin, short words, whole words in favor against abbreviation must be preferred. The intelligibility criterion implies that information are organized in a certain way and using a linear syntax; bombastic words must be avoided as well as the use of inverted commas in order to change the meaning of words. To comply with the help and support criterion, instructions and examples must be given. The handbook is complemented by a glossary of specialized terms for different sectors.

Within this program proposals for the standardization and simplification of the most common official forms have been defined. In order to train employees, many courses for the simplification of administrative writing have been organized. In addition to this, a software prototype allowing automatic checks on the level of legibility of documents has been developed.

The policy for achieving transparency, openness, predictability and client's participation in the administrative process was set up in 1990 by the Administrative Procedure Law . It was further developed and implemented in 1993 and more recently in 1997. Under this policy agencies must improve the provision of information concerning the administrative process to citizens both in general and individual terms.

Access to administrative records is allowed when the inquiring party has a specific and recognized interest in the matter at hand Areas like defense or foreign policy are excluded from this provisions. Furthermore agencies themselves have the power of indicating specific records and matters to be excluded. There must be a sound motivation for refused access.

Agencies must ensure the identification of the official in charge, set deadlines for case handling and allow consultation as well as participation of citizens. In order to help the implementation of this policy it was established that performance of managers will be assessed by internal auditing bodies including also performance against deadlines for case-handling. In this way responsiveness to clients is linked to managerial accountability. In 1997 the right of clients to be reimbursed if deadlines are not met was established.

Government openness can also be improved trough communication with citizens. All agencies are supposed to set up appropriate units for dealing with the public, "Ufficio di relazioni con it pubblico (URP). Since 1993, 2304 URPs have been established by different government agencies. Apart from handling different inquires by clients, these units indirectly monitor the performance of the agency through customer satisfaction surveys. They also have to ensure that inputs from clients enter the decision making process concerning the delivery of public services.

Since 1995 a program for granting awards is in place. It is called 'Cento progetti at servizio del cittadino (One Hundred Projects to the Benefit of Citizens). This aim at rewarding and extending excellence in delivering public services. Two experimental editions of the award took place in 1995 and 1997. Two hundred projects chosen from 3200 presented by agencies both at central and local levels of government were awarded. Selection criteria were: focus on clients, cost-effectiveness, consistency to the agency mission, extensibility to other public bodies, involvement of employees.

The improvement of service delivery and the performance measurement is the main objective of the "Pilot project program" run by the Dfp. Under this program pilot projects experimenting with new practices of good governance undertaken by different government agencies and departments are promoted and funded. One stop shops, multi-services smart-cards, as well as benchmarking, customer satisfaction surveys, total quality management, and BPR practices are being experimented at the central, regional and local levels of government.

The use of information technology in the delivery of public services is becoming more and more widespread. A boost towards this development is expected from the creation of a "Government Unified Network". This is the main initiative to increase efficiency within government and improve the delivery of public services to citizens and business. It will create the co-operation architecture of the existing information systems within the government (including regional and local governments) allowing to transform the current archipelago of systems into a loosely coupled co-operative system. The Government Unified Network architectural solution is based on the interoperability of independent systems and on telecommunication interconnections for the transport of services. With the Government Unified Network the use of smart cards and of digital signature will be widespread._ Smart cards are currently being used on a pilot base in several Cities. The regulatory framework recognizing the legal validity to the digital signature is now being completed.

Although the still limited implementation of these policies does not allow us to fully evaluate results, responsiveness to citizens has become an important component of the wider concept of accountability and as far as policies described above are concerned these two kinds of accountability can be strictly linked and mutually reinforcing. Responsiveness to citizens is closely related to the devolution of powers from central to local agencies and for this reason it will develop further.