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SANT'ANNA LEGAL STUDIES

STALS / PANÓPTICA BOOK REVIEW

Anna Margherita Russo,  
**Pluralismo territoriale e integrazione europea. Asimmetria e  
relazionalità nello stato autonomico spagnolo. Profili comparati  
(Belgio e Italia),**

Napoli: Editoriale scientifica, 2010

*reviewed by F. Pacini*

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**Fabio Pacini<sup>1</sup>**

Spanish regional autonomy appears as a relevant case-study in the European context for at least two reasons. Firstly, the *Comunidades Autónomas*' (CC. AA.) participation to EU regulation and policies is one of the most advanced, especially when compared to other regional systems – above all, Italy – which have come quite far on the road to autonomy but are still very shy on the issue.

From a more general point of view, since 1978 Spain has been an arena where central and peripheral Authorities continually challenge each other on policy making, allocation of resources and – ultimately – sovereignty. This magmatic context provides empirical data and “conceptual tools” which can prove useful to work out the jigsaw of the coexistence of sovereign entities in the European Union.

Both of the perspectives outlined above are developed in Anna Margherita Russo's book. Her discussion points and research methods are clearly summarized in the introduction, which serves as an ideal map of the entire work.

In a nutshell: the regional level is the optimal size for several of the most relevant social policies and, therefore, it simply can't be put aside by (often pluri)national States; based on this, the only way to understand the dynamics of the “struggle” for policies, resources and sovereignty in a multi-centric context is a “euristic” approach which consists of identifying the places where the dialogue between different levels of government takes place and how it is actually conducted.

In the first chapter, the Author briefly analyzes the debate concerning the dynamic EU constitutional process, from a distinctly Spanish viewpoint. Spain is the perfect example – and perhaps the ideal precursor – of this kind of process, given its endless constitutional transitions due to the absence of a clear-cut, “once and for all” allocation of competences.

The second chapter deals with the relations between the Spanish state and its *Comunidades Autónomas*. It also gives a fleeting account, given their scarce occurrence, of the relations amongst

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the various *Comunidades*. The detailed analysis is of particular interest in regard to the weak bonds that the *Comunidades* maintain amongst themselves when it comes to negotiating with the Spanish state, since they tend to compromise the *Comunidades*' overall political standing, and this is where the Author's main train of thought comes to light: the *Comunidades*' role in the EU decision-making process has made it possible for the legal context to change, therefore allowing the *Comunidades*' to "play as a one big team" for the first time.

In accordance with the structure of the book, in the third chapter the Author reflects upon the asymmetries that the Spanish system encompasses, as well as comparing it with the Belgian one. The Author also analyzes a peculiarity which is often merely hinted to by scholars who deal with regionalism i.e. the differences which are not rooted in the Law, but rather in economic, linguistic and historical factors.

Despite the notable differences between the Spanish and Belgian systems, the Author points out two relevant similarities: firstly, "dynamic asymmetry" as a natural state; secondly, the flexible and changeable nature of the allocation of competences. The EU integration process tends, on the one hand, to accentuate the existing asymmetries and, on the other hand, to set off new conflicts among various levels of government in order to acquire a status which would allow them to act as direct partners of the EU, not to mention hefty financial grants.

The fourth chapter brings the discussion to the regional institutional framework and asymmetries of the Italian system. In this case, the main issue taken into consideration is the absence of distinct regional peculiarities in favour of an essential uniformity of interests, i.e. the exact opposite of the process that is taking place in Spain. The Author's conclusion is that both extremes pose a threat to the concept of autonomy in itself, which requires a balance between aspirations towards uniformity and differentiation.

The final chapter tackles the theme of subsidiarity, which the Author regards as the indispensable "connective tissue" of a reticular, multi-level governance. Subsidiarity, in all its facets, works in such a way as to introduce a democratic element to governance by involving private citizens and it is probably the best way to allow for decision-makers at different levels of government to decide who is better suited to deal with what.

The Author often refers to her research as a metaphorical journey and this work is undoubtedly a precious "kit", where both methods and ideas are concerned, not just for those who

wish to understand the complex workings of the Spanish regional system, but also for whoever is adamant upon reaching the latest frontiers of today's – and tomorrow's! – constitutionalism.