

Bills on Italian Citizenship Law: A Critical Reflection

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Abstract

The Italian rules on how to acquire citizenship are inadequate in the face of the challenges posed by immigration. Various bills on reforming the system are currently before parliament. This article proposes to critically examine those bills with special reference to the issue of the substantive civic integration of immigrants and their children. The exam will reveal some satisfactory aspects but also negative ones in respect of which this article pinpoints various alternatives.

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Introduction

From a historical standpoint the Italian rules on citizenship originate from those in the Napoleonic Code. The 1865 legislation and again that from 1912 enshrines, above all, the basic rule of *ius sanguinis* as it was conceived of at the time: a person is born a citizen if their father is one. A foreign woman who marries a citizen also acquires citizenship. Indeed, “family ties in general, not just descent, play the main role as gatekeepers to nationality” [1], to the extent that right from the very beginning “Italian citizenship legislation so far may be classified as a familistic model” [2] according to Michael Walzer’s well-known typology [3]. However, there are also other chances for obtaining citizenship. An immigrant can become Italian by virtue of residency, at the authorities’ discretion, and in this regard the 1912 legislation lays down a minimum waiting time of 5 years. Moreover, whoever is born in Italy to a foreign father has a fast track to citizenship.

Law No. 91 of 1992 (“Citizenship Act”), currently in force, does not depart that much from the previous legislation.

This could well astound given that the context had changed immeasurably. In 1865 and likewise in 1912 Italy was not a country that attracted immigrants whereas in 1992 mass immigration to Italy had been a feature for more than a decade [4]. Moreover, in the event of mass immigration, the issue of the acquisition of citizenship by immigrants and their children cannot but have an important place in countries where the idea that the continuity of the people should imply a programmed closure to aliens has never held sway in the politico-legal tradition. Not surprisingly, in 1999-2000 Germany radically changed its rules in this respect [5].

But in 1992 the legislature did not take the changed circumstances into account, introducing a regulatory framework that was a continuation of the previous one “inconsistent with the social context in which it was conceived” [6]. This was essentially because Italy had become a country of immigration but it had not yet woken up to that fact culturally. Many even preferred to think that it was not immigration in a true sense but a case of an influx of temporary workers along the lines of the old German idea of *Gastarbeiter* (guest worker) without any impact on citizenship [7]. Consequently, in the parliamentary debate “the problem of the acquisition of nationality by immigrants or their children received almost no attention” [8].

The law confirms the basic rule of *ius sanguinis*, adapted to reflect the equality of the sexes [9]: a person is born a citizen if their father or mother is one. Likewise for marriage, no longer just a man but also a woman can transmit citizenship to the foreign spouse, and in this

regard only six months of marriage are required.

Furthermore, an immigrant can become a citizen at the discretion of the authorities based on residency. The period of residency has been lengthened to 10 years for non-EU citizens (considering the above rules and the favour accorded to the descendants of Italian emigrants, at this point one can speak of a net co-ethnic preference [10]). For EU citizens the period is 4 years because the legislator conceived EU nationals “as a sort of extended public family” [11]. Finally, whoever is born in Italy to foreign parents can acquire citizenship upon reaching the age of majority as long as there has been uninterrupted residency in the country.

Over the years the law has changed only slightly. With the so-called Security Act passed in 2009 the minimum duration of marriage was raised to two years, a term that is halved if there are children. 2003 witnessed the introduction of rules to foster the acquisition of citizenship by the children of immigrants in accordance with the framework described above.

However, since incoming migratory flows have continued and the immigrants have settled in Italy [12], it is widely believed that the law is anachronistic. Consequently, proposals for reform abound. Since 1994 in every legislative period there have been at least ten bills on citizenship [13]. In the fifteenth parliament (2006-2008) the Prodi government submitted its own proposals for reform [14] but subsequent governments have not presented any bills, leaving the matter solely in the hands of parliament. Moreover, a bill has also made its way into parliament from outside through a popular initiative process promoted by various leftwing and catholic organisations, amongst which ACLI, CGIL and Caritas, whose slogan is “Italy is also my country” (“L’Italia sono anch’io”) and which seeks to collect more than a hundred thousand signatures.

The proposals on the table today essentially concern the acquisition of citizenship by immigrants on the basis of residency and by their children born in Italy.

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Actually, the current debate concerns mainly the acquisition of citizenship by children. Emblematic is the fact that the start of the current seventeenth parliament in 2013 was marked by a heated debate based on a bill presented by the left wing focusing solely on children born in Italy to foreign parents. Among the signatories, Cecile Kyenge, an immigrant of African origin who would become Minister for Integration under the Letta Government. There are many calls to grant citizenship to children, even though against a backdrop of fears that this would incentivise further immigration [15].

This article seeks to critically analyse the various proposals for reform. It will commence from the Sarubbi-Granata bill [16], even though that is no longer current because it was presented in the sixteenth parliament (2008-2012). Named after its two proponents, it was destined to be a landmark, first and foremost, because it was proposed by two Members of Parliament belonging to two different camps, centre-right (majority at the time) and centre-left (in the opposition), and hence an expression of bipartisan views, even though not shared by all, with the consequence that the contents of the subsequent bills currently under consideration tend to be similar. Those subsequent bills have been proposed mainly by members of the Partito Democratico (PD), the leading leftwing party, but also by parliamentarians from the centre. Bills have also come from the main right wing party Forza Italia-Popolo della Libertà (FI-PDL) and more recently from the 'five-star' movement (M5S).

The main proposals will be described adopting a thematic approach and will be evaluated in terms of their adequacy at tackling the challenges posed by mass immigration. The analysis will also explore how other legal systems have developed in the face of similar challenges, especially the French and German ones which are traditionally the systems that Italy measures itself against.

Reference to the adequacy to address the challenges of immigration requires one to clarify what exactly is meant thereby since various meanings are possible.

In a context characterised by strong pressure to curb immigration, many maintain that citizenship law should be designed bearing that purpose in mind. That is not the view shared in this article because the aims of citizenship law should be much more and also because the link between citizenship law and decisions regarding migration is generally weak. A significant link can be found solely in relation to pure *ius soli*. Acquisition of citizenship in accordance with the model of the Fourteenth Amendment of the American Constitution can effectively encourage entry into the country of, in particular, pregnant women wishing to donate unborn children a good citizenship. That was seen in the 1990s in Ireland where a tradition of pure *ius soli* led to so-called birth tourism and polemics spurred change in the Constitution that led to the removal of pure *ius soli* in 2004. But pure *ius soli* does not enter into the current equation in Italy.

Consequently, proposals will be evaluated solely in relation to citizenship *per se*. In this regard, it should be noted at the outset that this study, adopting a traditional view, will proceed on the assumption that citizenship can be defined as a status of membership of a polity, which for the purposes hereof, in particular, entails "membership in a self-governing political community". Hence citizenship is a bundle of rights concerning "primarily, political participation in the life of the community", according to the republican ideal of citizenship as formulated by Aristotle, Machiavelli or Rousseau, and so it is

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Following on from the above, there is first and foremost a point of view that can be defined as a natural law one, which calls for laws and proposals for reform to be judged by reference to their capacity to enable whoever is rooted in a country to become a citizen thereof. Because being a citizen where one has settled permanently is considered to be a kind of natural right, also because in a democracy the governing and the governed must generally coincide. (That point of view finds support to some extent in international law: for example, the European Convention on Nationality stipulates that acquisition of citizenship should be made possible for the immigrant who is a permanent legal resident.)

Then there is the point of view that can be defined as political, which above all requires that laws and proposal for reform be judged by reference to the capacity to *guarantee*, in so far as it is possible, that whoever acquires citizenship has or is destined to have the characteristics of a good citizen.

Remaining on that point of view, moreover, it is worth evaluating also the capacity of laws and proposals to promote the foreigner's acquisition of the characteristics of a good citizen, in short, civic integration. The granting of citizenship consists in "the crowning of an integration process", but citizenship law cannot only be a gate but must also be a bridge.

This latter aspect often remains in the shade during analysis but it is important. True, civic integration is a complex process and, true, many factors are at play in its production [23], including, for example, economic factors not strictly linked to citizenship [24]. Nevertheless, citizenship law can be a factor of integration, and not the least important one. Let us compare for instance a legal framework that conditions naturalisation to a discretionary judgment about the *de facto* civic integration of the foreigner with a legal framework that instead provides for passing a specific test with a set of questions known beforehand and a specific course accessible to everyone. It cannot be denied that the latter promotes much better attitudes and behaviour favourable to integration.

Finally, there is another point of view, it too often overlooked in the debate, which is that of evaluating laws and proposals for reform in terms of their consistency with certain fundamental principles of the legal system, for example, the rule of law. That too will be taken into account in this article.

It was mentioned above that the bills concern in particular the acquisition of citizenship by immigrants by virtue of their residency and by children born in Italy to foreign parents. Those two issues shape the structure of this article: a section dedicated to the first issue,

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The acquisition of citizenship by immigrants by virtue of residency

As regards the acquisition of citizenship by virtue of residency, Italian law exhibits two important and at the same time problematic features: the discretion afforded to the authorities and a long residency period of 10 years for non-EU citizens. The bills address both legs. This section of the article will dwell above all on the prospects for change regarding the first aspect after which the second one will then be addressed.

Regarding discretion, it must be stressed that it is truly very broad, giving rise to a fine example of *arcana imperii*. Ever apart from the requirement of a certain number of years of residency, the law is silent on the further prerequisites and speaks of the grant (concessione) of citizenship, moreover, by decree of the President of the Republic. This has led officials to hold that they enjoy very wide powers of discretion. In substance the authorities require the lack of any negative implications from a public security standpoint, proof of income that in their view is 'sufficient' and knowledge of the Italian language and institutions, again based on what is sufficient in their opinion, because of the absence of any act stating the required standard.

This broad discretion obviously puzzles those who consider citizenship a natural right and is also debatable from the standpoint of the rule of law.

Moreover, one wonders if that is of assistance in ensuring that whoever acquires citizenship as or is destined to have the characteristics of a good citizen. Perhaps, before mass immigration or in the early years thereof, when applications were few, there might have been advantages in examining them on a case by case basis but in a context in which the number of applications has reached the tens of thousands, the absence of standardisation risks descending into a state of chaotic arbitrariness or paralysis. Regarding this latter risk, emblematic is the ministerial circular from March 2013 suspending the practice of interviews due to bureaucratic difficulties, interviews used – in line with the French model – to establish knowledge of language and institutions and also designed to make a rather questionable check on behaviour and convictions [25].

Finally, as to whether the discretion is likely to promote civic integration, it is clear that the difficulty of actually knowing the required characteristics certainly does not encourage foreigners to take steps to fulfil them. In that sense is, *inter alia*, the by now classic position of Brubaker who draws a sharp distinction between laws where "naturalization is a discretionary decision of the State" and those where "all candidates meeting certain clearly specified conditions are naturalized". In the former the state "does not promote naturalization" whereas in the latter, on the contrary, one could say that "naturalization is expected of immigrants" and it is also "actively promoted" [26].

In that regard the bills address the question of income and the more complex issues of language skills and knowledge of Italian institutions, in other words, so-called integration requirements [27]. All topics neglected in the past by the legislator, also because in the Italian tradition "the link between citizenship and national identity is relatively weak" [28]. Italian scholars, many of whom reason in terms of "post-national citizenship" as proposed by Soysal [29], at times criticise the weight given to integration requirements [30] – because they are an obstacle to acquiring citizenship and because, at least in part, they are linked to a *nationalistic* concept of citizenship – but it is interesting to note that by contrast immigrants consider them as essential for citizenship [32].

Regarding income, the bills require that it not be lower than that needed to obtain permanent residency, i.e. the long-term residence permit referred to in Directive 2003/109/EC. Currently, in concrete terms that figure is about 6,000 euros a year.

Regarding language, by contrast the indications can at times be rather vague. Indeed, there are some bills that even overlook integration requirements in general, like the one submitted by Senator Olivero and others from the centre of the political spectrum. In other cases, a precise requirement is stated: in particular the aforementioned Sarubbi-Granata bill required "knowledge of the Italian language equivalent to level A2/speaking" as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference and similar provisions can be found in the bills submitted by Bressa (PD), Gozi (PD) and many others.

As for knowledge of institutions, the bills contain only vague indications. The Sarubbi-Granata bill went no further than talking about "satisfactory knowledge of civil life in Italy and the Italian Constitution" to be ascertained through interview, and subsequent bills have adopted the same approach.

Finally, it should be noted as regards language and civic knowledge that in general the bills do not envisage official courses. The exception is the previously mentioned bill stemming from the "Italy is also my country" popular initiative. It proposes a different approach to civic and linguistic integration: to replace the reference made in various bills to linguistic and civic competence as a requirement with a reference to the commitment of the State in guaranteeing "the offer of courses for the knowledge of the Italian language and the Italian Constitution for foreigners applying for citizenship". The language and civic knowledge requirements are conceived as an obstacle. On the contrary, providing for tuition is seen as an opportunity. Likewise the Bianconi bill (FI-PDL) envisages a course instead of an exam: the course would have to be attended after submission of the application while the administrative procedure is ongoing.

Based on the parameters specified above the bills in question can be evaluated both positively and negatively. Positive because there are signs of progress compared to the current law. Negative because the proposed rules are open to criticism and especially because they are of a lower level than those in comparable legal systems.

The idea that the law and not an administrative authority should establish what an adequate income is certainly to be appreciated from a natural law and rule of law perspective (although radical doubts remain as to the reasonableness of contemplating a minimum income for citizenship in legal systems based on universal suffrage).

It is undoubtedly progress to require knowledge of the national language, fundamental for a good citizen. Also welcome is the fact that many bills precisely state the level required. It is clear that such is positive from the standpoint of citizenship as a natural right and also having regard to the rule of law, because it removes an important aspect of the assessment from the discretion of officialdom. Moreover, assessment is also streamlined in that way because one can reason in terms of predefined tests. And last but not least, integration is promoted in that the immigrant is given a well defined learning goal.

As for civic knowledge, in principle it is positive that such a fundamental element, traditionally assessed by the authorities, is indicated by law.

In general it is welcome that also in Italy, as occurred in Germany in the 1990s [34], there is an attempt to go beyond the idea of naturalisation as a discretionary matter (*Ermessenbürgerung*).

However, as regards language skills, opting for level A2 is rather puzzling. It is a very low level that does not enable one to understand messages that are even slightly complex, allowing solely elementary interaction. A2 is wholly inadequate for a citizen in a democracy. Significantly, in Germany for citizenship the law requires level B1, which is higher, and also in France the *circulaire* of November 2011 requires level B1/speaking. It should be noted that Italy, following the French model of the *contrat d'intégration*, requires immigrants to attain level A2 just to prolong a regular stay. This begs the question as to what logic there can be in requiring the same level for citizenship, a completely different status that one gains in a very different timeframe.

As regards civic knowledge, the absence of indications as to *what* an immigrant should know contrasts with the logic of citizenship as a natural right and also with the rule of law. Moreover, that shortcoming by definition does not enable the foreigner to rationally prepare for citizenship from this point of view: it is a wasted chance to promote the acquisition of the characteristics of a good citizen. By contrast it should be noted that the knowledge required is specified in those countries where a test is foreseen. For instance, in the USA tests are based on a set of questions known beforehand while in the United Kingdom there are official materials to work on for the test.

Another equally wasted occasion is the fact that the bills generally do not make provision for official courses. It is evident that the very fact of attending a course not only brings the immigrant into contact with the contents but also with other people – teachers and classmates – in a context favourable to engendering interaction that fosters behaviours and even sentiments that one associates with the profile of a good citizen. (It is no coincidence that MIPEX indicates provision for citizenship courses among the positive connotations of legislation [35].) And indeed it is very singular that no provision is made for official courses in a country like Italy where by contrast for years such courses have existed in relation to the *contrat d'intégration* since all it would take would be an extension in the direction of citizenship.

Let us now turn to residency period. The requirement under current law for 10 years of prior regular residency for non-EU citizens appears questionable, at least from the standpoint of promoting integration. It is only natural for people not to act when the objective is too far away and indeed a very long term may discourage integration by placing the prospect of formal integration afar of the horizon of reference for life choices. Incidentally, waiting times for citizenship can actually be

much longer because immigrants often begin their residency in the country without a regular permit and the naturalisation procedure can take many years; according to current law the deadline to respond to an application is fixed at a generous 730 days and in truth the average wait continues to be far longer. (In fact, according a recent survey, in Italy less than 30% of non-EU immigrants with twenty or more years of residency have become citizens [36].)

The 10 year period is also questionable in terms of reasonableness. Firstly, it is quite difficult to understand why for, say, a Bulgarian, integration in Italy in 4 years can be reasonably presumed and for, say, an Albanian, 10 years are needed even though Bulgaria is one of the European countries that stands farther from Italy in all senses much more than Albania. Secondly, it is arguable that 10 years is too long a period in absolute terms considering that neighbouring and similar countries demand a shorter period: Germany, which required 15 years until 1999, now requires 8 years [37].

In this regard, the bills mainly require 5 years of regular residency for non-EU citizens. This was the case for the Sarubbi-Granata bill, the “Italy is also my country” initiative and likewise for the above mentioned bills presented by the centre and by Bressa. On the other hand, 8 years are required by the Bianconi bill and also in some presented by PD parliamentarians like Gozi and Pes.

A 5-year requirement can be considered reasonable in view of the objectives of the law. Indeed, it is a widespread solution in Europe: five years are required in France, United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Sweden. The shortening of the period for non-EU citizens also makes it more reasonable by reducing the difference with EU citizens. It also sits well with more streamlined investigation and integration requirements: if in this way the assessment is more rigorous and it favours pro-activity, it is quite logical that the required time of prior residency be reduced. From another standpoint, likewise for Italy more openness in terms of reducing waiting times and discretion, on the one hand, combined with more rigorous linguistic and civic knowledge requirements, on the other hand, would prefigure that citizenship “constituted by political values rather than ethnicity” that Joppke and Morawska see as typical of the evolution of European legal systems [38].

If there is room for criticism it is that, from the standpoint of reasonableness and fostering positive behaviour in view of integration, there is no chance for an application in advance for those immigrants whose curriculum, so to speak, boasts elements of particular importance, as is the case in other countries. For example, in Germany an application for citizenship can be made one year earlier if the foreigner has attended integration courses (*Integrationkurs*) and in Austria too the period of prior residency may be reduced if there are specific elements of personal and work-related integration. These are fine examples of regulation promoting paths to civic integration.

The acquisition of citizenship by children of immigrants born in the territory

As mentioned in the introduction, the law provides that whoever is born in Italy to foreign parents has to wait until reaching the age of majority in order to be able to become a citizen on condition he/she has continuously resided in the country.

The powers vested in the relevant authorities in this case are essentially devoid of discretion: if the above conditions are fulfilled, citizenship must be granted.

That said, from a natural law standpoint, it seems excessive that a person can live in a country for 18 years without a chance to obtain citizenship. Especially the years of infancy and adolescence, when it is only natural that character is more easily moulded by the environment, leading to the paradox that the young reach adulthood as *foreigner* even though they are often indistinguishable culturally from their Italian peers.

This latter fact calls into question the intrinsic reasonableness of the law if the objective is that of ensuring as much as possible that the new citizen is a good citizen because the waiting time far exceeds what is necessary.

Apart from everything else it is decidedly prejudicial for the children of immigrants who become adults as *foreigners*. As minors, the children of immigrants benefit from full protection under the law and are usually included in the parents' permit but they then become mere foreign residents at majority, with all the limitations and legal issues that such entails.

This can only lead to a negative evaluation of the law in terms of how suitable it is to promoting civic integration. We are talking about youngsters who are often indistinguishable from their Italian peers, also from the standpoint of civic integration. Indeed, being catapulted into the above difficult situation literally overnight upon reaching the age of majority can compromise the civic integration achieved up to then, at least in the sense of negative returns on the sentiment d'appartenance that Renan mentioned as an essential feature of the citizen [39], just like the sense of belonging in terms of allegiance, to which reference is often made for citizenship [40]. Moreover, it is certainly inadequate to envisage citizenship after becoming eighteen years old when it is before that, in adolescence, that youngsters will wonder about their identity, including on a civic level. And then there is no sense in promoting integration if no importance is given to schooling.

In the face of this criticism, the bills mainly envisage the acquisition of citizenship at birth. As already mentioned in the introduction that does not herald pure *ius soli*. Acquisition is subject to the requirement that at least one parent have legally resided in the country for a number of years. This period ranges from one to five years depending on the bill. The Sarubbi-Granata bill required five years, and an analogous solution is contained in the Kyenge bill and the previously mentioned ones submitted by the centre. The Soria (M5S) bill requires three years. Finally, under the "Italy is also my country" bill only one year is required.

In the view of the various proposers, the requirement would not only avoid encouraging migratory flows but would also make the law intrinsically rational. If at least one of the parents has clocked up the required length of residency, it is supposed that there will be more favourable conditions for the successful integration of the children.

As in the case for naturalisation, the proposed rules can be evaluated in a positive light, on the one hand, because they would represent progress compared to the current law but at the same time negative because they are open to criticism and in any event inferior to the rules applied in other legal systems, especially those comparable to the Italian one.

From a natural law standpoint it is to be welcomed that some children born in Italy to foreign parents would have the chance to reach adulthood already a fully fledged citizen. Indeed citizenship

before reaching one's age of majority is compatible with promoting integration because it avoids people being shocked to suddenly find that they are a foreigner in their own country.

However, misgivings abound as to the reasonableness of linking the acquisition of citizenship to prior regular residency on the part of at least one parent for one, three or five years. The truth is that there is no reason for maintaining that such a requirement really impacts on the civic integration of the minor. The legal status of the immigrant does not change per se after one, three or five years of regular residency. Neither is there any particular empirical evidence that in general points to a rapid change in the condition or attitude of migrants in the early years of their stay.

Only with the previously mentioned permanent residence permit is there a significant change in status. That permit, considering the prerequisites there for (adequate income and accommodation), not only presupposes a certain level of integration but above all, because of the protection that it affords (i.e. a protection of the right to stay similar to that of citizens and full access to social benefits), promotes the integration of the family, which can effectively have an impact also on how the children grow up. It is certainly no coincidence that European countries like Germany and the United Kingdom that provide for citizenship on birth by virtue of the status of a foreign parent associate it with precisely possession of a permanent residence permit.

The questionable reasonableness of the solutions contemplated by the bills is borne out by the unjustifiable discrimination that it causes among siblings based on the order of birth. In fact, it is clear that whoever is born before the moment in time that at least one parent fulfils the prior period of residency requirement would be discriminated against compared to siblings born after that moment in time. But how can one possibly justify such discrimination without there being any real difference among the siblings as to their prospect for substantive civic integration?

Accordingly, one could make the above bills more reasonably by replacing the period of regular residency with possession of a permanent residence permit. But in doing so one would greatly reduce the extent of the change because such a permit can be obtained only after five years of regular residency while in reality immigrants tend to have children in the initial years of their stay.

On the other hand, a reform along the lines of the French model [41] would have a definite impact and at the same time be reasonable affording children born in the country to foreign parents the opportunity to obtain citizenship during adolescence provided that they regularly attend school [42]. Granting citizenship during adolescence means responding to the teenage question of identity by offering an inclusive civic perspective [43]. It would also value schools, a traditional agent of integration, including on a civic level, and combat the risk of dropping out of school. Additionally, it would prevent discrimination among siblings all born in Italy [44]. Incidentally, it should be noted that minors in Italy by definition do not exercise political rights and in principle cannot be discriminated on the basis of their passport. Therefore, granting citizenship during adolescence as opposed to at birth would deprive them of little or nothing in terms of their chances [45].

That said, it should be noted at this point, as mentioned in the introduction, that focusing the debate in Italy above all on the issue

of citizenship for the children of immigrants is probably unjustified.

But also from the standpoint of the interests of minors the issue of citizenship for migrants is of key importance. Not only because the citizenship of parent can significantly change the overall life of the family but also because on the basis of a traditional rule citizenship in Italy, once acquired, is automatically transmitted not only to the spouse but also to children under the age of eighteen. Consequently, if one were to significantly reduce the prescribed period of prior residency and standardise requirements and checks thereby guaranteeing speedy procedures, a substantial amount of the children of immigrants would obtain citizenship due to transmission thereof from their parents before reaching the age of majority.

Conclusion

One will have noticed a certain convergence among the various bills, including those coming from opposite ends of the political spectrum. Regarding immigrants non-EU citizens, there would seem to a possibility of reaching broad agreement on reducing the prior period of residency required, if not to five then at least to eight years. Likewise there would seem to be broad agreement on precisely indicating the required language skills. As regards the children of immigrants a consensus seems to building on granting them citizenship on birth in the country provided that one of the parents has 3-5 years of regular residency behind them.

In the above terms the conditions would seem to be ripe for a sharp change to current law, even though the issue is not generally considered as a real priority and there is always the risk of an ambush around the corner because in Italy, as elsewhere with immigration, “citizenship policies, which used to be fairly stable and supported by cross-party consensus, have become thoroughly politicized” [46].

Moreover, this article has highlighted some reservations regarding the reasonableness, generally speaking, of the bills, which should serve as food for thought for the various political forces.

Regarding immigrants, criticism was levelled above all at the stance of requiring solely A2 level language skills and of not specifying the civic knowledge required, thereby missing in part the goal that “naturalization becomes more of a right than a favour by replacing vague assimilation criteria with clearer language and integration criteria” [47]. These aspects need to be rethought, taking as a point of reference inter alia the German reform in that direction made in 1999-2000.

As for the children of immigrants born in Italy, the decision to opt for the solutions described above was criticised in that it would be preferable for citizenship to be acquired during adolescence along the lines of the French model.

Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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