

In memoriam

Pietro Grilli di Cortona: a dedicated scholar and a humane person

Maurizio Cotta
UNIVERSITY OF SIENA

On July 16, 2015, Professor Pietro Grilli di Cortona, then President of the Italian Political Science Association (SISP) prematurely died at the age of only 61 years, after a long battle with a serious disease that he faced bravely. He is survived by his wife Barbara and three children.

The death of Pietro is a sad loss for the whole community of Italian political scientists. I was particularly moved by this event, as I had known him personally since the years when he was still a brilliant student in the Cesare Alfieri Faculty of Political Sciences at the University of Florence and I was a young assistant professor there. Watching his academic progress, I remember that I was immediately struck by his serious commitment to the study of the great political phenomena of the twentieth century. Shortly after graduating from the University of Florence with a dissertation on Stalinism and post-Stalinism, under the guidance of Professor Domenico Fisichella, he moved to Rome. He became an assistant professor there in the Faculty of Political Sciences at the University of Roma La Sapienza. His academic career continued in the University of Trieste and he finally returned to Rome at the Roma Tre University, where he became a full professor in 2000.

Pietro Grilli should be remembered as a first-class scholar, a person ready to take up institutional responsibilities when it was required, and a deeply honest man. Starting from his dissertation, his research interests were clearly focused: Communist political systems, their internal crises, and their destinies after Soviet rule broke down were the central focus of most of his books and articles. In his first work, *Le crisi politiche nei regimi comunisti. Ungheria, Cecoslovacchia e Polonia da Stalin agli anni ottanta* (Angeli, 1989), published just before the crisis of the Soviet empire reached its climax, he had carefully explored the weaknesses of Communist rule in three satellite countries and the decisive role of the Soviet Union in preserving these regimes. Through a comparative analysis of the Hungarian insurrection of 1956, of the Czechoslovak crisis of 1968, and of the Polish events of 1980–81, Grilli explored the factors leading communist regimes to the brink of collapse and discussed the limited reconsolidation enabled by external intervention.

After his first work, it was almost an intellectual necessity for him to deepen his understanding of the authoritarian and totalitarian regimes born from revolution and in particular of their power apparatus on the one hand; and on the other, to keep track of what happened when these regimes collapsed. He devoted the book *Rivoluzioni e burocrazie. Continuità e mutamento negli Stati rivoluzionari* (Angeli, 1991) to the first theme; and

to the second his volume *Da uno a molti. Democratizzazione e rinascita dei partiti in Europa orientale* (Il Mulino, 1997). The interest in what was happening in the post-Communist countries continued to stimulate his research, which was conducted also in association with other scholars (*Transizione e consolidamento nell'Europa centro-orientale*, coedited with S. Bartole, Giappichelli, 1998). The study of Communist and post-Communist countries was also a stimulus for Pietro to extend his research to a more general analysis of the problems of democratization: in this field of research we can mention his book *Come gli Stati diventano democratici* (Laterza, 2009), the edited volume (with O. Lanza) *Tra vecchio e nuovo regime. Il peso del passato nella costruzione della democrazia* (Il Mulino, 2011); and the recent *Crisis and Breakdown of Non-Democratic Regimes in the Third Wave. Causes, Trends and Outcomes* (Washington, New Academia Publishing, forthcoming). His comparative interest in the political transformations undergone by European states led him to also analyze some of the underlying problems related to the state- and nation-building processes (*Stati, nazioni e nazionalismi in Europa*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2003).

Pietro Grilli, while primarily being a dedicated and active scholar did not eschew his institutional responsibilities both in the academic world and outside it, which are not always gratifying, but must be taken up. At the Roma Tre University, he was director of the Department of International Studies, member of the Senate, and was also asked to run for Rector. Until his death, he guided the Italian Political Science Association, ensuring a delicate equilibrium between innovation and respect for good traditions. In 1994, he was made a member of the national commission of the Italian government for the reform of the Constitution and of the electoral system, and in 2000 he was nominated by the President of the Republic as an expert in the CNEL (the National Council for the Economy and Labor).

Having known Pietro for many years I would like to remember him not only as a scholar and a good citizen, but also as a wise, deeply honest, and fully humane person. He had strong beliefs, but I do not think that anyone ever felt offended by him. We will miss you Pietro, but the memories of who you were and of what you have done will stay with us.