

## Budget law psychodrama

In the week in which the government and its ruling coalition partners pass more or less unscathed the Senate gathering on the EU bailout fund reform (the M5S in fact leaves on the ground three senators, that passed to the League, while the ruling coalition numbers get thinner and internal disputes are on the rise), the parliamentary discussion for the approval of the Budget law reminds us that a merciless battle is still in progress between the main protagonists of Italian politics and other actors for various reasons involved. From year to year the autumn and winter weeks that go with the gestation of the financial maneuver are undoubtedly the most frenetic for legions of politicians, public officials, companies and trade unions members, journalists, associations, public affair firms and individual professionals. The fact that the law being approved often to the finish line needs most of the time additional implementing decrees before it can become fully operational (usually, by springtime) signals that this sounding similar war path has become over time sclerotic and dysfunctional. After days of postponements, heated discussions, proposals for amendments and missteps, during the last week the Budget Commission of the upper-house has given the green light to the maneuver's text, which has now landed on the Senate floor in view of the confidence vote on the government's maxi-amendment scheduled for Monday. The draft budget will then move to the Chamber of Deputies, which will probably only ratify the Senate's decisions given the limited time available to approve it before year's end in the event of new

changes to the text. If things had to go this way, it would be only the fourth time in over 25 years since the beginning of the so-called Second Republic in which the Parliament skips the budget law's second reading. The other times were 2010, 2011 and 2016 and this, perhaps, contributes to explain part of the irritation manifested by the head of State Sergio Mattarella for its approval timing and discussion modalities in the Senate. The point is that this instrument conceived to bring order into Italy's distressed public finances has long proven to be less and less capable of pursuing truly structural policies and reforms, for the benefit of the parties' immediate purposes and approval rates. It is not surprising then that despite the virtuous autumnal proclamations about upcoming public debt cuts, public spending and taxes reduction and fight against tax evasion, every winter the Italian ruling class succeeds only in resurrecting the blame game and creating contrasts between social and industrial sectors. The consequence is sugar tax vs web tax, plastic tax vs aviation tax, e-cigs vs traditional cigarettes, company cars vs gambling and so on. This, in turn, causes a serious communicative and media short-circuit that ends up punctually feeding the seemingly irreversible process of emancipation of Italian society from the referents of the old party system, that appears less and less capable of grasping the demand for innovation and change coming from the citizens. And on the contrary fatally prisoner of dusty and outdated liturgical schemes.