

competition and with it the format and the dynamics of the party system. This is the aim of this paper. Particularly, the idea is to explore to what extent Duverger's law about the consequences of majoritarian/plurality systems apply to Italy.

### *From the old to the new party system*

The most striking development of Italian politics in the past nine years has been the emergence and consolidation of a bipolar pattern of electoral competition. This stands in marked contrast with the previous pattern which was tripolar and based on the centrist dominance of Christian-Democracy (DC). The new bipolar party system is the result of two factors: the destructuring of the old party system due to the judicial investigations of the 1992-1993 period and the concomitant introduction of the new electoral rules. Both factors produced the change. It is doubtful that one or the other alone would have had the same effect. The last elections of the old era still yielded a centrist majority and the Amato cabinet which was created thereafter was still a coalition of the DC, the Socialists (PSI) and other minor centrist partners. The Party of the Democratic Left (PDS)<sup>1</sup> and the Italian Social Movement (MSI) on the right were still in opposition and not fully legitimized. What would have been the evolution of this party system without the intervening factors mentioned above? Hard to say. But we can guess that the transition to any other type of party system would have been much slower than what happened. Let us assume that the MMM system had not been introduced and