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**Abstract**

In December 2010, a comprehensive reform (Law 240/2010, or 'Gelmini reform?') changed the institutional governance and internal organization of Italian state universities. This paper investigates the redefinition of the state role in the light of public management reform narratives, linking them to the Governance Equalizer Model to evaluate how the on-going reform process has affected the power sharing arrangement and coordination mechanisms in the Italian higher education system thus far. Rhetoric of reform was influenced by the New Public Management narrative; Law 240 was presented as a fundamental change to the traditional Italian governance regime, based on detailed state regulation and academic self-governance. In practice, contradictions between the rhetoric of the reform and the effectiveness of implementation are evident: Italian reform complies more with the Neo-Weberian narrative and it did not have any substantial impact on power distribution.(HRK / Abstract übernommen)