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**Abstract**

The paper provides a descriptive account of recent changes in Italian higher education policy, focusing in particular on the impact that recent reforms have had on the internal governance of the nation?s universities. The paper shows how the government?s policy of reform (which is currently moving away from the traditional ?command and control? approach to a ?steering from a distance? policy) risks being either ineffective or attaining its goals too slowly due to the persistence of deeply rooted, previous institutional governance practices. The greater autonomy currently enjoyed by universities is managed in a corporatistic-oligarchic decision-making style, which leads to sluggish distributive outputs and institutional adaptation to external changes. The paper provides empirical evidence of this institutional inconsistency. In an attempt to deal with this problem, there have been discussions and debate in recent years about re-designing the institutional arrangement of universities, even though it is unlikely that any coherent decisions will be taken on this matter, due to the intractability of the problem resulting from a series of political, cultural and social factors. (HRK /

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