Explaining and Assessing Independence:
National Competition Authorities in the EU Member States

Mattia Guidi
Ph.D. Thesis defence on 28 May, 2012

Abstract: This Ph.D. dissertation aims at answering two questions, which are closely related to each other:
How do politicians decide about the independence they give to regulatory agencies?
Is there a link between the amount of independence which an agency enjoys and the way in which it performs its tasks?
The first question investigates the factors that lead politicians to delegate in the field of competition policy. The second question concerns, more broadly, the relationship between costs and benefits of delegation. This dissertation focuses on national competition authorities (NCAs) in the EU member states, being antitrust one of the few really “European” policies, enforced in the same way in all the countries by the European Commission and by the NCAs.
The main empirical analysis (Chapter 3) tests a theoretical framework, based on both original hypotheses and previous contributions. In order to measure formal independence, an index based on several features of agency autonomy has been developed. The results confirm the two original hypotheses advanced in this work. On the one hand, the degree of independence of NCAs is influenced by political polarisation and by the presence of big firms in the national economy (the higher the polarisation, the higher the negative impact of big firms on independence). On the other hand, independence is related to EU membership: the longer the country has been member of the EU, the more independent the NCA is. These findings have been “cross-checked” with a series of interviews with expert and members of competition authorities in France, Italy, and Greece (Chapter 4). In Chapter 5, the hypothesis of a relationship between independence and performance has been tested. According to the results of this statistical analysis, greater formal independence leads competition authorities to investigate more cases and to issue more decisions.
Bio: Mattia Guidi holds a Bachelor’s Degree in International Studies (2005) and a Master’s Degree in International Relations (2008) from the Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Florence, and a Master of Research in Political and Social Sciences (2009) from the European University Institute. He has been a visiting researcher at the Pompeu Fabra University, Barcelona (2009), and research assistants in several research project at the European University Institute and the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies (2009-2012). In 2011, he has been a teaching assistant at the ECPR Summer School in Methods and Techniques, Ljubljana. He is currently a research assistant in the project “Managing Regulation: A Firm’s Perspective”.

His Ph.D thesis focuses on national competition authorities in the EU member states. In this work, he analyses both the reasons which lead politicians to delegate to competition authorities and the consequences of independence for the regulatory output. His research interests include: political economy, regulation and institutional change; competition policy, both at national and EU level; international political economy and international trade; party politics, relationship between party preferences and policy outputs.