

THE CAMERLENGO OF THE STATE BUDGET LAW

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Telos: When you were appointed Undersecretary, the headlines in the papers were something along the lines of "Here comes the nice lawyer". What did that mean at the time and what has it meant during this year of government?

Federico Freni: I don't remember which newspaper coined that definition, but I do remember that I smiled as I read it. See, I believe that, in this world, one more smile is always better than one less, especially in a context like politics, where smiles are rare. It doesn't just mean being nice as much as listening to what everyone has to say, the majority and the opposition alike, and finding the fairest way to bring everything together: because no majority will ever be completely right and no opposition will ever be completely wrong. Just think that, in the long days when we were trying to approve the Budget Law, a really juicy piece came out in a newspaper calling me "The Camerlengo of the Manoeuvre" [Ed's note. Manoeuvre is the political jargon for economic-fiscal packages, in this case the State Budget Law]. Even there -quite successfully- I tried to bring together everyone's arguments.

So, obviously, each of us has a legitimate political stance, but I believe it's the duty of whoever is governing to do their best to evaluate each stance, obviously giving precedence to the interests of the Country. Then, look, ultimately, smiling is also good for your health, try it and you'll believe it!

You often call yourself a technocrat lent to politics. However, do you believe this distinction really exists, regardless of whether or not a person has been elected?

People usually distinguish between technocrats and politicians in order to highlight technocrats' capability and politicians' presumed ignorance.

Although during this legislature we have witnessed surreal discussions (technically surreal, by all means), I believe that a good politician must also be a good technocrat. I have never believed in the rule of "one is worth one", much less in politics.

First of all, you need to study and, most importantly, it takes great humility: talking out of turn about topics you don't know anything about or that you aren't adequately prepared on can be damaging. So, to conclude, I hope this distinction continues to fade, because I am aware that pure technocrats will never be able to grasp the issues and dynamics of politics, but I surely hope that good politicians might (must, indeed) also have adequate technical competence.

Taxes and social cohesion, an ever hot-button topic that has recently become really hot. What is your point of view on what can be concretely done to face this time of economic uncertainty?

It's not going to be an easy time. The geopolitical situation also impacts the State Budget and forces us to make rational, directed choices. But this doesn't mean giving up our values, it doesn't mean forgetting the needs of the Country.

Only by making a serious effort at reform can we get the oxygen we need: but to be truly effective, the reforms have to be sustainable too, they have to be connected to the economic and social fabric of the country without any ruptures, because even the best reform risks becoming an economic and social boomerang if it isn't sustainable.

This is all the more reason why right now we need to set aside ideological approaches and concentrate on the real needs of families and businesses.

Professor Freni, in your previous life, you were the author of numerous scientific publications on topics relating to administrative law and accounting justice. Instead, today we'd like to get to know Freni the reader and opera buff. Can you describe him for us?

Let's just say that each of us has many faces. If I wasn't doing this job, if I hadn't studied to be a lawyer, then a university professor, I would have enrolled in the conservatory. I have a deep, boundless love for opera and for classical music in general. You can't live without Bach, you can't understand what it means to be human without listening deeply to Bruckner or Chopin, no one experiences passion better than Puccini and no one has shown us impetus and emotion like Verdi. I owe a lot to my maternal grandmother who took me around to various opera houses from the age of 13. But I must say that today music, opera especially, is an integral part of my life. So, without fail, I wake up with opera and go to bed listening to Bach.

It's true I am also a compulsive, serial reader, and I only read paper books: excessive technology isn't for me, I need the smell of the paper, the weight of each page, I like the movement of physically flipping through a book.

This winter I reread lots of Russian classics: from my favourite *Oblomov* by Goncarov (one of the great masterpieces of Russian and world literature) to the unforgettable *War and Peace* (a new Italian translation just came out recently, splendid) to *The Death of Ivan Il'ich* by Tolstoj. People should reread the Russians, at least every five years. Especially now, I don't think you can really completely understand this unfortunate war without reading the classics of Russian literature. They have an

almost magical effect, at least on me. But, and this is just an obsession of mine, you need to read the Russians when it's cold. Now that it's summer, I've moved my attention to more *accommodating* fiction, from the crime fiction of Antonio Manzini to historical non-fiction (incidentally, the last historical book by historian Ernesto Galli della Loggia is amazing). So, if I had to choose a passage from an opera that best describes politicians, the first one that comes to mind is one from the prologue of *Pagliacci* by Ruggero Leoncavallo, which I think fits perfectly:

*So think then, not of our poor
theatrical costumes but of our souls,
for we are men of flesh and blood.
Breathing the air of this lonely world
Just like you!*

Marco Sonsini

Editorial

We would like to reveal the identity of our guest in the August issue of PRIMOPIANOSCALA *little by little*. Is it a man? Yes. What's his job? Lawyer and university professor. Is he young? Yes, by Italian standards, I'd say he's very young. Is he aggressive and argumentative? No, he's quite the opposite! Is he a music and literature buff? Yes. This isn't a very fitting description of your average generic government representative. But this is our guest, and this is what he does (or at least what he'll be doing until a new government is formed). He is the Undersecretary to the Ministry of Economy and Finance for the Draghi Government, appointed by the Council of Ministers on 23 September to replace the outgoing Undersecretary Claudio Durigon on 28 September 2021. He was also chosen for his recognised negotiating skills. We're talking about Federico Freni. This year he has managed to reach some unexpected agreements by studying each dossier and coming up with solutions to get the more reluctant parties to agree. A technical work indeed, but it's political as well, because oftentimes it turns out that the fight against *zigzagging*, as the preferred tool of Italian politics, is not an easy one.

His role in the approval of the last Budget Law earned him the title "The Camerlengo of the Manoeuvre", given to him in an accurate account that appeared in the *Huffington Post* in what Freni himself calls a "very juicy" piece by Giuseppe Colombo: "*In the manoeuvre, the ball's in their court for a few hours. Then it's goodnight, senators.*"

What is he, a technocrat or a politician? Do caretaker governments really exist? We are well aware that the distinction between a caretaker government and a political government has no basis in our Constitution and probably makes no sense from a formal point of view. Yet the definition of a caretaker government has become part of our political vocabulary and refers to governments that *in theory* are neutral with respect to the political orientations in Parliament. So, this means the executive branch, with the Prime Minister and most of his government team, are not chosen from among the political forces but from a pool of independent experts. This is akin to the idea of technocracy, i.e. a *government of technocrats* in a last-ditch effort to solve a country's problems by following a line of action that is scientific, rational and rigorous. I may risk sounding like an iconoclast, but I find far more convincing Professor Elio Borgonovi's definition of a caretaker government as "*people with specific knowledge and skills who for a more or less long period in their lives and after various processes of legitimisation and appointment, perform governing functions, which is a political function tout court.*" If it wasn't, people would forget the simple fact that every government is born of a specific political choice, and all governments are subject to a confidence vote in the Houses.

We cannot ignore the fact that, according to the Italian Constitution, the Italian State has a parliamentary form of government; hence, government formation is dependent on the Parliament, which must support it from the outset as it carries out its business. The last question we ask Freni is very personal. We rather timidly asked him if he would share something with us about his love of music and voracious reading. He doesn't hold back and his answer is passionate and intense. Read it and see. Also because Freni describes politicians at work using a quote from... an opera!

The cover of the August issue of PRIMOPIANOSCALA *dedicated to Federico Freni* has the same *pop, oneiric* look, featuring the face of our guest and a collage of juxtaposed, unelaborated images that are symbols of his work, role and life arranged around his head like a hat. Freni, the *nice* lawyer, "wearing" the monuments of the Eternal City, the building where he currently works, symbols of his profession - from the robed lawyer to the law encyclopaedia - and ALL his passions: cooking, opera and books.

With this August issue, published a bit earlier than usual, at the beginning rather than the *end of the month*, we here at Telos A&S hope that this steamy summer - even steamier because of an election campaign that is quite *unusual*, no, *almost unique* for the season - is enlivened by fresh, interesting political propositions. Oh, and I almost forgot, the football championships are starting again and will begin before mid-August because they will be put on hold for the World Cup. On the beach, people will be talking about nothing but football and politics, as if the summer were already over.

Mariella Palazzolo

Federico Freni has been the State Undersecretary of Economy and Finance since September 2021 and is in charge of social and welfare spending, relations with the Customs and Monopolies Agency (in particular, gaming and tobacco). He also takes part at the negotiation tables on corporate crises at the Ministry for Economic Development.

He graduated in 2004 in Law from the Sapienza University of Rome and earned a PhD in Administrative Law. He did research on Administrative Law in the Public Law Department of the Sapienza, then became a Teaching Fellow in Administrative Law at both the Sapienza and the University of Salento. He is a Professor of Administrative Law and Administrative Procedural Law at the Luiss University School of Specialisation and, since 2019, extraordinary Professor of Administrative Law at Pegaso University. He has been admitted to the Rome Bar and in 2015 qualified to practice in the higher courts. Since 2014 he has been one of the founding partners of Studio MVL Avvocati Associati in Rome. He is a founding member and on the board of the Association of Young Administrative Lawyers (AGAmM). From 2018 to 2021 he was a legal advisor to the League-Salvini



Premier parliamentary Group both in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. From 2020 to 2021 he was the chairman of the board of 4AIM SICAF.

He has authored scientific publications and monographs, including *The New Extraordinary Appeal to the President of the Republic*, and he is on the editorial board of the legal magazine *Giustamm* of the State Mint and Polygraphic Institute.

He has a variety of interests that he pursues in his free time. What are they? He loves cooking, reading and listening to classical music and opera. He also enjoys travelling around Europe to opera houses. He tells us that the phrase that best represents him is an old adage attributed to Saint Augustine: *serva ordinem, et ordo te servabit*. Preserve order and order will save you.

He was born and lives in Rome - *and he wouldn't trade it for any other city in the world*. He's married with two children who are 6 and 8 years old. He's 42.

Marco Sonsini

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