

Principle of Equality and Social Care Policies in the Italian Regional System between Autonomy and Centralization

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Abstract: The paper analyzes the extent to which the principle of equality is complied with in social care policies in the Italian regional system, deepening the tensions between autonomy and centralization arising from the relationship between the State and the Regions. Social care policy is, in fact, one of the sectors in which there is great tension between central government and territorial autonomies. According to the Italian Constitution, while social care is a general (*rectius*: residual) competence of the Regions, the principle of equality – stated by Article 3 of the Constitution with formal and substantial meaning – should be ensured through the exclusive (*rectius*: cross-cutting) State power (stated in Article 117 Cost., Par. 2 let. m) to lay down the essential levels of care/services. Over time, some circumstances – the cross-cutting powers of the State, failure by the State to determine the essential service levels; the economic crisis – have led to deep conflicts between the Regions (autonomy) and the State (centralization) which have often been solved by the Constitutional Court whose task is to ensure compliance with the principle of equality.

Keywords: Principle of equality, Social care policies, Italian regional system, Essential levels of care.

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