The objective of this special Issue is to collect contributions on the theme of the De-Politicization of the [representative] politics in the era of neoliberalism.

De-politicization has been defined in many ways [Foster et al. 2014]. We consider it, in short, to be a set of changes in the ways power is exercised. These modes downgrade the political nature of decision-making [Burnham 2001] and, through representation, give legitimacy to actors apparently less able to bear witness to the presence of the “political” [Wood and Flinders 2006; Hay 2007]. Politics appears less responsible for the decisions that affect the regulation of society and the impact of their costs and failures on economic and cultural processes. Political choices conditioned by the market acquire the character of necessity and inevitability. De-politicization has been consolidated in various ways. In the European context, a “government,” a “discourse and social” de-politicization have, in particular, been observed [Hay 2007].

The de-politicization of government in turn has different facets, concerning the polity [Jessop 2014] and the relationship between government and governance. It consists of the displacements of the decision-making powers from elective offices to arenas presented as neutral, objective as well as remote from – or "above" – institutional politics [Flinders 2008]: central banks, independent regulatory authorities, agencies of various types [Burnham 1999; Hay 2007; Kettel 2008], public utilities privatized and made dependent on the market rather than on the interference of politicians and their short term visions dictated by electoral rhythms [Flinders and Bullers 2006a]. These shifts define de-politicization as one of the effects of the meta-governance which re-regulates governance [Jessop 2011; Fawcett, Marsh 2014].

Another shift of powers, implemented through decisions of governments and national parliaments, benefits non-elected and of higher scale actors, such as strong (intergovernmental) bodies and procedures of the European Union (e.g. the 2012 Fiscal Compact) and the so-called Troika (Council, European Commission, IMF, ECB), and produces various forms of compliance with the international agreements and rules, whose enforcement is handed over to actors and technical tools [Flinders and Buller 2006b; Huggins 2015]. These shifts accumulate powers outside of state policy, but also call for a de-accountability of political actors [Burnham 2001; Kettel 2008; Wood and Flinders 2014]. This mechanism also operates at the local and territorial level.

Another side of this phenomenon is the use of meta-decisions that make it impossible to make other decisions later, tying the hands of policymakers [Flinders and Buller 2006b]. For example, constitutionalizing the obligation of a balanced budget (as it happened in Italy) depoliticizes the national economic policy. Its task is reduced to monitoring and adjusting the process with measures that fall within pre-set standards.

Technicization of processes is also an important part of de-politicization, with the assignment of regulatory effects and resources allocation to technologies such as evaluation, with the primacy it gives to “the numbers”, or technical procedures in support of political decision-making. Choices become evidence-based and free from ideologies and social pressures. Or, again, expert systems, algorithms, rating and benchmarking. The “technicians” become the protagonists, sometimes called on to directly perform the function of “depoliticized politics,” as in the governments of national unity, legitimized in the name of emergencies and exceptional situations. For these governments, representation and consent have no value. They are chosen for their professional skills and their reliability for the markets and the supra-national institutions.

The attempts to legitimize the investigation of public choices through deliberative arenas governed by non-political parameters, based on information and knowledge, are not external to this aspect of de-politicization.
A discursive de-politicization determines the convergence of preferences [Flinders and Buller 2006b] into a single, albeit diverse, cognitive construction of reality (frame for public actions). It is no coincidence that the prevailing paradigm in the contemporary liberal political economy has been narrated in the form of a “single thought” demonstrating a clear cultural hegemony of the trans-nationalized and financialized capitalism.

Policies become inevitable responses lacking rational alternatives to the limits of development set by previous responses, with which contradictions and conflicts had previously been appeased. Especially in Europe the tarnishing of values and programmatic differences between left and right - both give priority to growth and the market - is a consequence and evidence of this kind of de-politicization. Convergence is helped by the communication of imagery and knowledge brands [Jessop 2009; Sum and Jessop 2013] of great power (the influence of pre-rational emotional states involving individuals, political decision-makers and epistemic communities on the acceptance or rejection of an idea of policy) and by seductiveness, i.e. a specific normative force, which is exercised by indicating what to aspire to and how to strive for it. These are forms of communication and construction of meaning based on appeals or slogans [Wood 2015], referring to a shared sense imbued with moral values. The consensus is mobilized around the assumptions that social acceptance cannot be doubted and this therefore legitimizes unquestionable paradigms.

De-Politicization is probably one of the cause of the growing distance between institutional politics and civil society in Western country and, unavoidably, it determines some consequences. We think that, on the social side, some consequences can be found in the political indifference on the part of citizens (political apathy) and, on the contrary, in growing forms of non-institutional social and political participation through the practices of social resilience and resistance; on the political side, we think that one of the consequences is the birth, everywhere in Europe, of populist parties and movements that, in their rhetoric, emphasize its intention to give back sovereignty to the people.

The main objective of issue highlight theses phenomena that, also in a critical and provocative way, can contribute to describe the many aspects of this process proposing both theoretical and empirical work.

Submission procedure:

Articles, written in English, should be submitted to the editor according to the following schedule:

- Submission of long abstracts (about 1,000 words): 20th JANUARY 2017
- Selection of long abstracts: 1st FEBRUARY 2017
- Submission of articles: 1st APRIL 2017
- Provision of peer review feedback: 1st JUNE 2017
- Submission of revised drafts: 15th JUNE 2017
- Publication of the issue: JULY 2017

Articles should be no longer than 10,000 words, including notes and references.

Please refer to the editorial guidelines available at http://siba-ese.unisalento.it/index.php/paco/about/submissions#onlineSubmissions

Please address any queries to the Editor – Proposals and papers have to be sent to him