Ufficio Stampa della Provincia autonoma di Trento
Piazza Dante 15, 38122 Trento
Tel. 0461 494614 - Fax 0461 494615
uff.stampa@provincia.tn.it

COMUNICATO n. 1359 del 02/06/2014

THE IMPACT OF PRIMARY ELECTIONS ON DEMOCRACY: THE AMERICAN MODEL AND ITALY

In the USA, the candidates of the two main parties are selected through direct primary elections for almost all federal, state and local elections. This has taken place since 1915 and has become a key feature in the democratic life of the nation. This was the starting point for the session "Are primary elections good for democracy?" presented at Palazzo Geremia, featuring James M. Snyder, one of the most authoritative American political analysts and introduced by Pietro Del Soldà, a journalist with Radio 3 Mondo. Snyder's analysis considered the pros and cons of primary elections, the repercussions on the democratic model and the possible role that they could have in the Italian political system in the future.-

The analysis of the American political analyst, Professor of Government at Harvard University since 2010, underlined first the benefits of primaries, which reduce the power of managers and the party machinery, also leading to the selection of candidates of higher value, without forgetting how the competition focuses on concrete facts and not on ideologies. According to James M. Snyder, the primaries also help electors to get rid of outgoing candidates of little worth, allow some transversal issues to be solved democratically and ensure that battles between internal factions in parties are sorted out through fair competition. This helps to avoid splits within the party. However, Snyder also emphasised the potential problems of primary elections: "According to many", he explained "primaries weaken ‘responsible' parties and promote personal politics at the expense of political planning. There is also an aspect of polarisation of positions, with candidates who move to the extremes to gather the votes of the most radical voters. Furthermore, one can note that primaries often prevent compromises within the party, when for example the ideology of the candidates and the voters in primaries tends to be similar, meaning that factors other than ideology can have an important impact on voting choices. Vice-versa, in general elections, when the candidates tend to be more distant at ideological level and when the differences in political orientation are clear, ideology and derision can dominate in voters' choices". Turning to Italy, a nation in which this system has only begun to take on concrete form in the last ten years or so, according to Snyder our country also has the potential to increase competition at local elections through the system of primary elections. -

()