

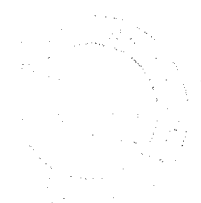
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# National and European Foreign Policies

Towards Europeanization

Edited by Reuben Wong and Christopher Hill

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<sup>14</sup> Germany has participated in the UN's first maritime stabilization operation UNIFIL off the coast of Lebanon since September 2006. The Bundestag has extended the Bundeswehr's mission on a yearly basis. On 17 June 2010 the Bundestag extended the mandate and Germany's participation in UNIFIL mission to 30 June 2011. In these years the number of German soldiers has been reduced from an original of up to 2,400 in 2006 to 300 in 2011 (Bundeswehr 2010).

<sup>15</sup> Fox and Godement 2009. Fox and Godement distinguish between an 'accommodating mercantilist' and an 'assertive industrialist' approach in Germany's China policy. The first one means that 'good political relations with China will lead to commercial benefit' and states 'compensate for their readiness to resort to protectionist measures by shunning confrontation with China on political questions.' For the authors Schröder's approach to China fitted this category. The 'assertive industrialist' approach, which according to the authors is Merkel's policy, is characterized by a willingness 'to stand up to China vigorously on both political and economic issues' and 'to criticise China's politics and to defend industrial interests or protect jobs at home from Chinese competition.' However, whereas Schröder and Merkel have dealt with the political issues differently, in the economic realm both have pursued attitudes which are protective of the German industry, revealing more a difference of degree than of policy in their economic approach towards China.

<sup>16</sup> With a share of 8 per cent Germany is the third largest contributor followed by other EU partners – e.g. the United Kingdom (6.6 per cent), France (6.1 per cent) and Italy (5 per cent). Together, the twenty-seven Member States of the EU contribute over a third of the overall UN budget (Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations New York, 26 January 2011, [http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/EN/Aussenpolitik/Friedenspolitik/VeranteNationen/StrukturVN/Finanzen/Finanzbeitrag\\_D\\_node.html](http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/EN/Aussenpolitik/Friedenspolitik/VeranteNationen/StrukturVN/Finanzen/Finanzbeitrag_D_node.html)).

## 4 Resisting Europe?

### The case of Italy's foreign policy

*Elisabetta Brighi*

For all the received wisdom and numerous expert analyses invariably depicting Italy as one of the member states most devoted to the European cause, this paper will argue that Italy's relationship with Europe and its institutions is actually not only more complex, but significantly less reassuring than usually granted. If one raises the question of the extent to which the EU has shaped Italian foreign policy and the extent to which Italy has shaped EU foreign policy, as this book does, one is confronted with conflicting evidence.

On the one hand, it is not uncommon to find claims that corroborate a 'mythical' European narrative: 'For over half a century, Italy has looked at European integration as a fundamental objective and a privileged instrument of its external relations ... Among the "big states" of Europe, Italy has been traditionally the most persuaded of the potential of the European project as an economic, political and security project'.<sup>1</sup> Yet, the problems and quirks that accompany Italy's participation in EU's foreign policy become apparent as soon as one looks closely at the phrasing of such claims.

The opening statement of the *Rapporto 2020* – recently published and the first comprehensive, strategic review of Italian foreign policy since at least the end of the Cold War, a review which lays great claim to innovation and creativity – betrays a rather literal, instrumental outlook vis-à-vis 'Europe'.<sup>2</sup> Europe is an *opportunity* not to be missed, from defence integration to economic and political governance; Europe is an *instrument* of Italy's external action; finally, Europe is a *venue* in which Italy can be reassured of its status among the 'big states' of the continent. Of course, Europe is also recognized as a common objective (as such implying involvement and contribution on the side of Italy), but one should note how vague and lofty here the language becomes – as if it were sufficient to be 'persuaded of the potential' (i.e. the ideal) of a 'project' to be automatically and actively part of it. Rather tellingly, this chapter bears the title of 'Europe *for* Italy' (emphasis added), not 'Italy for Europe'.

So what is the real degree of Europeanization of Italian foreign policy? If Europeanization lies in a two-way, negotiated process of convergence over time of policy goals, preferences and identity in an EU context, Italy seems to be far from having reached the endpoint – but also, and precisely because, in some sense, it has already arrived there. Since 1991, the traditional and absolute (and most of

the time rather passive) reliance on the EC/EU, combined with the accustomed ability to use European institutions as both a *shelter* and an *instrument* of foreign policy, has paradoxically produced ever stronger incentives to free ride, and an increasingly opportunistic and instrumental attitude vis-à-vis the EU, which is all too easy to read between the lines of the *Rapporto*.

After decades of relative passivity during the Cold War, national projection in foreign policy has thus become an option – and indeed a frequent reality over the last few years – even on those occasions in which this meant straying from the European way, or contributing to the divisions within the EU. The interaction between the EU and Italy in the realm of foreign policy is thus much more complex than a superficial reading of the subject might allow. It reflects not just a harmonious and progressive idea of a 'closer and closer' integration, but also a strategic and dialectic process, often conflictual in nature.

In what follows, I explore the hypothesis that since 1991 the degree of Europeanization of Italian foreign policy has varied, in rather erratic ways, due to a number of factors, among which party politics plays a key role. This is a change from the previous, Cold War domestic consensus and solidity on foreign policy. The swings that have characterized Italy's domestic political scene, with an alternation of centre-right and centre-left governments, have determined some changes in the foreign policy discourse, style and choices of Italy in the realm of foreign policy. This has affected the degree of Europeanization of Italian foreign policy via changes in Italy's propensity both to adapt its foreign policy to that of the EU (on the 'downloading' side) and to project national ambitions ('on the uploading side') within, rather than without, the EU.

Impacting on the degree of Europeanization of Italian foreign policy have been two general, background factors: one is the changing strategic scenario of the last two decades, and what Italian foreign-policy makers have made of it; another is the crises that have invested the EU itself from the late 1990s, which have impacted on the calculations of Italian foreign policy and changed the balance of incentives and constraints, or at least their perception thereof.

Further, the degree of Europeanization also shows some variance across issue-areas, with the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) being the policy most 'Europeanized', and relations with external powers being the least. This can be read in various ways. For instance, the continuity of Italy's involvement in issues such as ESDP can be ascribed to, inter alia, the presence of strong lobby groups in the defence industry pushing for further integration. More generally, the paper will consider the argument of whether Italy's foreign policy in specific fields such as defence and energy is no longer guided (if it indeed has ever been) by a genuine political design, but rather by the strategies and preferences of big economic actors such as FINMECCANICA and ENI. This economic motive has tied in with European foreign policy only on an ad hoc, intermittent basis.

The paper will conclude by looking at the overall process of interaction between the EU and Italy in the field of foreign policy, arguing that this is a fully strategic and dialectic process rather than a simple, top-down or bottom-up set of

developments, whose end results are by no means predetermined. Given the traditional recalcitrance towards change in the land of the *Gattopardo*, and this includes change brought about by Europe, maybe all that can be expected of Italy is the skilful attempt to negotiate margins of autonomy while not upsetting an 'order', be it European or international, which continues to be perceived as 'falling from the sky', as Altiero Spinelli often put it, referring to Italy's attitude to Europe (Spinelli 1960).<sup>3</sup>

### **The turning point of 1989–1991: Italy between two eras**

The years 1989–1991 no doubt represented a critical juncture for Italian foreign policy and, more generally, Italian politics (Andreatta and Hill 2000; Guzzini 1994). The foreign policy trajectories pursued by Italy today derive, implicitly or explicitly, from the consequences of that dramatic passage of the end of the Cold War. In fact, one could well argue that the problem with the Italian politics of today, domestic and foreign – its stagnant yet equally volatile disposition – is that of being still stuck in the 'unfinished transition' of the post-Cold War system, not having dealt conclusively with the end of one era, and the beginning of another.<sup>4</sup>

What was Italian foreign policy before these dramatic years? And, in particular, what was Italy's attitude towards Europe? While a detailed answer to these questions is beyond the scope of the paper, it is essential to give at least a broad account of Italy's Cold War foreign policy 'paradigm', not least because its ghost still haunts the buildings and the minds of Italy's foreign policy establishment today (see, amongst others, Santoro 1991; Varsori 1998; Coralluzzo 2000).

Italy's Cold War foreign policy was predicated on a skilful and for the most part successful balancing act. This was set in motion in the years immediately following the end of the Second World War by its Christian Democratic leadership and revolved around a set of commitments to the US and NATO, the EC and the UN – commitments which most of the time turned out to be congenially complementary, but which also involved much tightropeing, squaring of circles and, characteristically, verbal fudging at times of crisis.

In terms of Italy's post-war attitude towards European integration, this is usually described in rather mythical terms. The traditional reading of Italian historians is that Italy enthusiastically embraced the integration project from its inception. From that point, Europe progressively came to be internalized in Italy's domestic political debate as a given, and a largely positive one at that. Beside the normative motive of federalism, to which large sections of the post-war political spectrum adhered, it was the political, economic and security rationale of the process of European integration which appealed to Italian policymakers. The incentives were apparent: regaining a high political status after the disastrous 'parenthesis' of fascism, strengthening a nascent democracy, modernizing the country by anchoring its economy to Europe's continental 'engine' and, finally, benefiting from the security umbrella that the US was willing to offer to Western Europe.

A few elements of this traditional reading, however, need to be substantially qualified. First, one should note the uncertainty which in fact surrounded Rome's participation in the very first phases of integration – suffice it here to mention Italy's serious reservations concerning the Brussels Pact of 1948, the laborious ratifications of both the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951, and the European Defence Community (EDC) in 1953. Second, Italy's decision to join European integration, culminating in the Rome treaties of 1957 instituting the EC, did not always translate into an active, let alone entrepreneurial, role in the process. On the contrary, throughout the post-war decades, the lack of information and relative apathy which accompanied Italy's engagement with European institutions was notorious; note also the stark contrast between the chronically high level of infringements of European regulations, on the one hand, and the launching of grand proposals for further integration in the 1980s, on the other; or, lastly, the delaying tactic used in the face of stringent measures, fiscal and otherwise, decided by Brussels.

Be that as it may, Italy's balancing act between the US, Europe and the more than symbolic allegiance to the UN came to a halt in 1989, when the Iron Curtain fell. Most of all, this event meant a threat to Italy's geopolitical status and the end of that confrontation between East and West which had enhanced Italy's strategic value, and hence had paradoxically suited the country very well. The reconfiguring of the continent's geopolitical landscape, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the transformation of Eastern Europe, the waves of instability which spread across the Balkans through to Central Asia and North Africa, and the political process of reform triggered inside the EC and NATO were met with great nervousness in Rome. Indicative of the danger of marginalization in a post-Cold War environment was Italy's exclusion from the negotiations leading to the '2+4' treaty of 1990 in which German reunification was decided, or the uncertainty with which Italy approached the IGC on Economic and Monetary Union, which was to lead to the Maastricht Treaty of 1991.

To complicate things further, the end of the post-Cold War period also coincided with a phase of domestic upheaval.<sup>5</sup> The political system which had governed Italy during the Cold War collapsed under the combined weight of the judicial inquiries of *Tangentopoli* and the demands for change coming from civil society. After a phase of great uncertainty, and the dissolution of the old cleavage between Christian Democrats and Communists, the political system restructured itself around a confrontation between the centre-right parties, among which was Silvio Berlusconi's new *Forza Italia*, and the centre-left parties, led by Romano Prodi.<sup>6</sup> This new political elite was called to deal with the end of the post-war order and the beginning of a new one. Such a reassessment not only involved Italy's attitude vis-à-vis European integration but, as the next section will illustrate, progressively eroded the post-war consensus on Italy's European policy, including its foreign and security policy.

### The uneven impact of Europeanization on Italian foreign policy since 1991

What results did the process of interaction between foreign policy at the European and national level yield in the case of Italy after 1991? How did Italy adapt its foreign policy to the positions taken in Brussels and what contributions did Rome make to the creation of such positions? Finally, did this interaction produce anything resembling a transformation of the preferences, goals and identity in Italian foreign policy? In what follows I shall look at these questions as they have emerged in particular issue-areas, such as Italy's relations with external powers and the issue of human rights, the country's participation in ESDP, and its foreign policy vis-à-vis the Middle East. As I shall argue, Italy's foreign policy positions on all of these themes, relative to those of the EU, have been affected by a certain degree of volatility caused by domestic political changes, in particular changes in the governing coalitions. The style, discourse and choices of the centre-right and centre-left governments have differed at the level of concepts and paradigms. In practice, however, this difference has been often less marked than in theory, with the policies of the two coalitions blurred together on more than one occasion. The puzzle with which this leaves us, and which I will deal with in the next section, is to identify whether the underlying aspects of continuity can be ascribed to the pressures coming from Europe and its foreign policy, or must be interpreted as the result of other processes at work.

#### Italy's relations with external powers and organizations: the US and Russia

The end of the Cold War did not change Italy's commitment to the Atlantic Alliance. In the eyes of Italy's foreign-policy makers the hegemonic position of the United States has not lessened the appeal of a transatlantic security alliance – quite the contrary. Atlanticism has informed Italian foreign policy to a varying degree, however, and has not been the only principle guiding Italy's external actions. Just as in the days of the Cold War, this principle has had be squared with Italy's other commitments: to the EU but also, increasingly, to the country's emerging nationalism.

As a very general pattern, and at the level of discourse and style, the centre-right governments of Silvio Berlusconi (I: 1994–1995; II: 2001–2006; III: 2008–) have advanced a position of closer cooperation with the United States than those governments led by a centre-left coalition – the Prodi governments of 1996–1999 (I) and 2006–2008 (II) and the D'Alema government of 1999–2000 (Brighi 2007a). This has been apparent in general trends such as Berlusconi's overall stronger endorsement of the US response to the 9/11 attacks, and of the military interventions in the Middle East; but also in specific decisions, such as the appointment of one of Berlusconi's closest aides (Giovanni Castellameta) to the ambassadorship in Washington. Bilateral ties between Rome and Washington

have thus thrived under the centre-right government, despite instances which provided much potential for tension (Brighi 2007b).<sup>7</sup>

If this has been the general trend, however, it must also be said that in practice differences have been often less than marked between the courses of action pursued by the centre-right and the centre-left (Bonvicini 2007; Croci 2007). For instance, on more than a few occasions, and despite their own verbal commitments, centre-left governments have opted for policy choices that one would have expected from more conservative and pro-Atlanticist governments. Foreign Minister D'Alema's determination to show all his American credentials during the Kosovo war of 1999 is a case in point, the Prodi government's unflagging support of the US decision to enlarge its airbase in Vicenza and ready acceptance of the request that Italy 'should do more' in Afghanistan were also particularly indicative.<sup>8</sup>

How has this overall pattern interacted with EU's foreign policy vis-à-vis the US? As a general rule, it seems that EU's foreign policy positions on transatlantic issues have found less resonance with the centre-right governments of Silvio Berlusconi than with the governments of the centre-left. Indeed, under the centre-right coalition Italy has not only strayed from the European line (when there was one) but, on occasions, effectively contributed to furthering the divisions within the EU, sacrificing European solidarity (or what was left of it) at the altar of Atlanticism. After all, Berlusconi was probably the European leader who most strongly endorsed the talk of 'old' versus 'new' Europe coming from Washington, which was typified by the 'United we Stand' open letter of the eight leaders, including Berlusconi, from the self-proclaimed 'new' Europe (*The Wall Street Journal* 2003). Most significantly, in the case of military operations in Iraq, the centre-right government of Silvio Berlusconi did not show much patience with the predicaments of some European states – and sided clearly with the US's policy of invasion, despite then contributing only in symbolic terms to it.

Both the centre-left and centre-right believe that the US plays an indispensable role in guaranteeing world order: Italy's Atlanticist reflex is alive and well, and it is only strengthened by the US's long-standing presence inside Italy, bringing wealth and jobs via its bases and transnational corporations. As the next section will illustrate, however, Italy is also committed to a 'stronger' Europe in the field of defence and security. Thus, and very simply, there is no solution for Italian foreign-policy makers other than to consider the two commitments complementary – as has been the case during the Cold War and after.

It is worth noting that this rather static picture stands already in stark contrast with expectations of the progressive convergence, or transformation, of the Italian foreign policy objectives due to an increasing process of Europeanization. If one looks at relations with the US, Italian foreign policy seems to have changed very little – despite the end of the Cold War, on the one hand, and the strengthening of European foreign policy, on the other.

However, the two governing coalitions have demonstrated different degrees of tolerance when faced with a divergence of interests between the US and the EU. While the centre-left has tried to bridge gaps and mend cracks, the centre-right has

been more inclined to take sides, usually that of the US, provided that this did not come at too high a price. In doing so it deliberately tried to avoid the pressure coming from Brussels, either by ignoring it or diluting it by simply reinforcing divisions within Europe.

Italy's relations with Russia show a slightly different trend. Russia did not figure very prominently on the radar of Italian foreign policy for most of the 1990s, except in the sense that for quite some time Rome opposed NATO enlargement for fear of provoking resentment in Moscow and simultaneously gave great weight to Russian positions during the Balkan crises (Dassù and Menotti 1997). This considerate yet relatively disengaged attitude towards Russia, mirroring the European attitude of the time, changed considerably with the advent of Berlusconi and his centre-right government in 2001. In only a few years, Italy's bilateral relations with Russia improved so much that Rome became Moscow's most important commercial European partner after Germany. Berlusconi also enthusiastically sponsored the rapprochement between Russia and NATO which climaxed in the NATO-Russia summit at Pratica di Mare, Rome, on 28 May 2002 (*La Repubblica* 2002). Personal ties between Putin and Berlusconi grew particularly strong, as the two leaders exchanged frequent visits to their personal or holiday houses.

On various occasions, Berlusconi's eccentric policy of close cooperation with Russia flew right in the face of EU's attempts to coordinate common positions. In terms of the EU's growing concerns for human rights, Berlusconi famously defended Russia's policy in Chechnya in public – and not just in his capacity of Italy's Prime Minister but as President of the EU during Italy's semester in November 2003. Berlusconi showed little concern for coordinated European attempts to put pressure on Russia over its systematic violations of human rights, sympathetic as he claims to be with Putin's fight against 'terrorists'. Rather, he adopted a course of action closer to that of Germany under Gerhard Schröder, privileging bilateral concerns and economic issues.

Paradoxically, however, one should note that this did not change much once Berlusconi left power in 2005. Under the centre-left government of Prodi, Italian organizations reached important economic agreements with their Russian counterparts, such as the cooperation between ENI-Gazprom on the *South Stream* pipeline designed to bring relief to Italy's chronic energy dependence, or the agreement between Alenia (a defence company of the FINMECCANICA group) and Russia's Sukhoi for development of the a new series of aircraft. For the pragmatic and business-oriented Vladimir Putin, the transition from 'Dear Silvio' to 'Dear Romano' was a fairly smooth one.<sup>9</sup>

Though Prodi certainly never went so far as to defend Russia's policy in Chechnya, European unity has been undermined by some of the policies that his government has pursued or supported. Thus, for instance, ENI's activism in Russia, which received the blessing of the Prodi government, effectively creates problems for European initiatives such as the Nabucco pipeline, sponsored by the European Commission with the aim of reducing Europe's dependence on Russian oil. This cannot but increase the divisions within the EU in terms of energy policy and, more generally, foreign policy towards Russia.

in itself, units already seems to demonstrate that in the case of Italy's relations with Russia, a certain continuity is discernible between centre-right and centre-left governments in terms of their disregard for EU positions. However, the following qualifications apply: first, centre-right governments have been more inclined to break the European unity on politically sensitive issues, such as human rights, than centre-left governments. It may be argued that this does not amount to a difference in substance, but merely of preferences, but it is doubtful that Prodi could (or would be willing to) go as far as Berlusconi did, in words and deeds, to please Russia and upset his European partners. Second, Italy's resistance to Europeanization in relation to Russia can at least in part be explained by the strength of industrial groups such as FINMECCANICA and ENI, both of whom have built on the historic economic ties between Italy and the former Soviet Union and boast strong links with the political-economic establishment that cuts across the right-left cleavage in Italian domestic politics.

### Italy and the ESDP: Europe, after all?

As some commentators have argued, security and defence represent the two areas in which Italy's policy has been most influenced by the EU. Since the turning point of the Saint Malo summit of 1998, Italy has backed the process of acceleration in integrating defence and security across Europe, under the twin umbrellas of CFSP and ESDP. In fact, throughout the 1990s Italy had constantly shown a high propensity for further integration in the field of security and defence – only to be caught off guard when cooperation actually accelerated and the process of ESDP was finally set in motion by the UK and France (Andreata and Hill 1997). From then on, and despite occasional hesitations, Rome has been supporting concerted European efforts at building common institutions for ESDP and a common European defence industry.

Unlike in other areas, governments of the centre-right and centre-left have displayed exactly the same preferences on the defence component of European foreign policy. Thus, the Prodi and Berlusconi governments both committed themselves to making considerable contributions to the military and civilian Headline Goals; to supporting Italy's participation in the European Capabilities Action Plan (ECAP), and then in the European Defence Agency (EDA); to promoting the launch of and then sustaining Italy's participation in the European gendarmierie force (EurGendFor). Most military operations pursued under the umbrella of ESDP have been attended by Italian forces: from Albania to Bosnia-Herzegovina, from Gaza to Macedonia, excluding the French-led operation *Artemis* in Congo and that in Indonesia (Aceh).

The Berlusconi government's performance in ESDP was particularly surprising, given the Atlanticist and supposedly Euro-sceptic credentials of its leader. Despite the bad start made with the government's withdrawal from the Airbus A-400 European project, during the 2003 EU Presidency semester, the centre-right government demonstrated a thoroughly cooperative attitude towards Europe, supporting the process which led to the creation of the European Security Strategy

(ESS) and brokering a number of important agreements and positions – such as the compromise on the delicate issue of the EU military headquarters, the 'Joint Declaration on Cooperation in Crisis Management' between the EU and the UN, the 'Declaration of the European Council concerning transatlantic relations' on US-EU relations. The selection of Gen. Mosca Moschini to head the Military Committee (MC) in 2004 was seen as a reward for the energy and efforts put into this process. The centre-left government which followed, under the leadership of Prodi, continued this trend of close involvement in ESDP, including its open support for the institutional innovations included in the Lisbon Treaty in terms of CFSP/ESDP.

Despite this encouraging picture, however, there are also elements which inevitably put in Italy's commitment to a common European defence in doubt in the long run. The first is the state of the defence budget, which has been subject to constant cuts over the last 20 years, and is currently estimated to be just below a meagre 1 per cent of GDP. More generally, given Italy's laborious legislative processes, it is often difficult to approve and mobilize funding speedily, and to turn verbal commitments to projects such as the FREMM frigates into a reality (*Il sole 24 Ore* 2004). The composition of Italy's defence spending is also not in line with the most advanced ESDP states: suffice it here to mention that spending for personnel still represents between 70 and 80 per cent of the total, and that investments in R&D are an underdeveloped 8 per cent of the GDP. This last figure is particularly worrying if one thinks of how much R&D is central to the kind of collaborative, European projects to which Italy is committing itself. The last element of (potential) weakness is constituted by Italy's 'other' defence commitments, especially in the field of procurement: namely, Italy's collaboration with the US, which has intensified considerably over the last five to ten years. As it has been recently announced, Italy's Alenia Aeronautica will be providing the US Army and Air Force with its air-lift plane C-27J, and this follows the successful bid of AugustaWestland, another company of the FINMECCANICA group, to provide the US Presidents with EH101 helicopters. The two sets of commitments have been perceived as alternative, rather than complementary, on numerous occasions.

Notwithstanding these limits, Italy's cooperation in European defence has been on the whole solid and stable, an objective shared between parties and coalitions for more than a decade now. Part of this stability comes from a simple realization, common to all of Italy's political forces. Italian policymakers, of both the centre-right and centre-left, have increasingly acknowledged that integration is in the country's interest, and not only because of the virtuous economies of scale that it would produce. After all, Italy is finding it increasingly difficult to sustain the military effort necessary to back its foreign policy commitments on the basis of a constantly shrinking defence budget.<sup>10</sup> As international commitments grow in number, it becomes more and more clear that just as with any other middle-sized European country, Italy cannot simply afford to 'go it alone' in defence and security. Integration and specialization of the defence sector in Europe are objectives which it is in Italy's interest to support in tandem. High-ranking military

officials in Rome and now in Brussels have increasingly pushed for this objective – as have big industrial groups such as FINMECCANICA, not without their own axes to grind.

## Italy, the Middle East and Europe

Throughout the post-war period, Italy has claimed to have 'special interests' in the Middle East and the Mediterranean, often pursuing a foreign policy of activism in the region (Coralluzzo 2006). This was one of the few channels through which Italy's residual nationalism could be legitimately expressed – though it often led to confrontations with other actors present in the region, most notably the US, as in the Achille Lauro affair. Italian foreign policy since 1991 has partially continued this trend. How has this interacted with EU's foreign policy in the region? And how has this interaction been influenced by the changing strategic scenario in the region?

Iran provides a particularly interesting case in point. Against the backdrop of Italy's 'historic' ties with pre-revolution Iran, and significant economic interests, the centre-left governments of the 1990s were among the first to embark on a policy of 'constructive dialogue' with the moderate government of Mohammad Khatami, and lobbied for such a policy in Brussels. Despite much economic and cultural cooperation, however, the policy of 'constructive dialogue' never quite delivered what it had promised, and was cut short by the change in strategic climate following the attacks of 9/11 and the subsequent election in 2005 of the conservative Mahmud Ahmadinejad to the Presidency in Iran.

Despite the EU's continued interest in dialogue with Iran, the centre-right governments quickly replaced the policy of engagement with a hard line, following Washington's strategic preferences. In fact, as has been recently revealed, during Italy's EU Presidency the Berlusconi government turned down the possibility of joining the diplomatic initiative of the 'Big Three' to Tehran, in spite of the invitation coming from Iranian officials (*La Repubblica* 2005). As it has transpired, Berlusconi showed no interest in following the EU lead on this issue and decided to let this opportunity pass by – possibly for fear of upsetting Washington, though in fact wholly misunderstanding the US position on the matter, which was relatively favourable to a European diplomatic mission.

It is thus deeply ironic that over the last five years Italy has tried in every possible way to be re-admitted to the club, voicing criticisms of European 'directives'. It is difficult to say how much of this effort was determined simply by calculations of relative power (namely, avoiding exclusion) and how much dictated by a real interest in the contents of the negotiations – but is this not precisely Italy's perennial problem? In any case, it is doubtful that this rather complex trajectory can be associated simply with a straightforward 'adjustment' and 'convergence' of Italy around a common European policy, itself constantly in flux (cf. Alicata 2008).

The case of Italy's policy in Afghanistan and Iraq presents fewer complications. Since 9/11 it has been clear which side Italy has opted for, joining US-led military

interventions – though in symbolic and political terms, rather than military ones. The recent withdrawal from Iraq has come only after a gradual disengagement negotiated under the Prodi government – when, however, Berlusconi himself had already announced a similar exit strategy, no doubt with electoral considerations in mind. Despite differences in the discourse, the governments of centre-right and centre-left have not substantially differed over Italy's Afghanistan policy, which has featured an increasing commitment of Italian troops and resources and a higher profile for Italian diplomats and military officials in the area.<sup>11</sup> Despite strong internal opposition, the centre-left governments of Prodi have acceded to the requests coming from Washington (and other Atlanticist states),<sup>12</sup> and stepped up the country's presence – all of this without converging around a European foreign policy, for there has not been the consensus to make one possible.

Lastly, Italian foreign relations with the Middle East were once again under the spotlight during the crisis in Lebanon in the summer of 2006. For a variety of reasons – some historic, given Italy's prominent involvement in the war in Lebanon of 1982, some more short term, given Prodi's desire to reassure the US that the withdrawal from Iraq did not mean withdrawal from the Middle East – Italy was keen to contribute to the resolution of the crisis. This was to be done, first, by sponsoring a peace conference in Rome which, however, did not achieve its objective and, second, by leading the UN-sponsored mission 'UNIFIL-II' in Lebanon (see Ronzitti 2007). Presented as a foreign policy success in Italy, the mission suffered from the fundamental ambiguity with which the troops on the ground had to deal, namely the lack of a clear and strong political mandate to restrain, if not completely disarm, Hezbollah. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Berlusconi government formed in 2008 announced precisely a change of the 'rules of engagement' in Lebanon – a direct result of a request from Washington which expressed American worries over the increased influence of Iran and Syria on Hezbollah, and its re-arming.

What needs to be noted, however and most of all, is that the EU was remarkably absent from Lebanon. Single European states like Italy or Spain are there, but no European mission, nor special envoys. Despite the regular attempts to talk up an 'EU presence' in Lebanon, no ESDP mission could be agreed. Naturally, this tells of the selective reach of CFSP/ESDP operations, but also about Italy's willingness to go ahead alone when the EU lags behind. Just as in the case of Albania in 1997, faced with hesitation, paralysis or veto in Brussels, Italy has taken the lead – not so much in trying to build the necessary consensus within the EU, but in projecting the country's influence in an area of perceived strategic interest.

## Italian foreign policy and the EU: a re-assessment

The picture emerging from the account of Italian foreign policy in its relation with the EU is a rather complex one, and one that fits uneasily with the more simplistic accounts of Europeanization. As argued in the Introduction to this book, the process of Europeanization that emerges from what has been illustrated here can only be understood as genuinely dialectic and strategic, multilevel and issue-specific.



Thus, the EU and its foreign policy institutions have encountered and interacted with Italy in a variety of foreign policy areas and issues – in some this encounter has led to a confrontation of preferences and goals, in others to a rather natural blending of objectives. All of this has been negotiated, even calculated and managed through the political will of the different actors involved. The first finding to be noted, thus, is that the more benign accounts of Europeanization as a progressive, inevitable and predetermined transformation of not only the objectives, but the identities of the actors involved, simply do not apply to Italy. Despite embracing the European ideal verbally for more than half a century, this country has also shown some remarkable resistance to the changes effectively brought about by European integration (Quaglia and Radaelli 2007; see also Della Porta and Caimi 2007). Despite having displayed greater volatility over the last 15 years, Italian foreign policy seems resistant to substantial change in terms of its objectives and identity.

Concerning the degree of Europeanization of Italian foreign policy, there is a lot of variance that needs to be accounted for, beneath its rather static appearance. First of all, there is variance brought about by changes in the domestic political arena. As illustrated throughout the paper, the alternation of centre-right and centre-left coalitions has led to a considerable fluctuation in the discourse and style, if not always in the actual choices, concerning Europe. There has been discontinuity, but only in the sense that the oscillations of Italian foreign policy have been wider, with different governments showing different appetites for exploring options traditionally outside of Italy's diplomatic radar (e.g. Berlusconi's 'radical' Atlanticism). There is no doubt, however, that despite these oscillations, the pendulum of Italian foreign policy still gravitates heavily around that 'middle ground' formed by the intersection of Italy's two traditional commitments – to the US and to the EU. In other words, the squaring of circles and verbal fudging remain Rome's preferred diplomatic assets, just as in the Cold War. Hence, even Berlusconi's Atlanticism was arguably pursued successfully only thanks to the divisions existing within the EU – and the lack of a strong European constraint – which he then marginally exacerbated. At the same time he had no desire to do without the European theatre entirely.

There is, however, a serious implication of this. In choosing the 'line of least resistance', Italy also accepts that its foreign policy will always be more reactive than proactive, guided by laborious strategic calculations necessary to keep the circles squared, rather than by genuine contributions to the cause. The implications for Italy's position in Europe are obvious: what has Italy genuinely contributed to the strengthening of European foreign policy – aside from the various holiday venues where treaties are signed and declarations issued, to paraphrase Spinielli's provocative remarks (Spinielli 1967)? Given its increasingly overstretched foreign policy, it seems that Italy is structurally unable to do more.

Even granted this modicum of 'Europeanization', one still needs to investigate its different meanings or uses in Italian foreign policy. ESDP is a case in point. As illustrated above, this seems to be possibly the area most affected by Europeanization, given Italy's commitment and close involvement in the process.

Yet a fairly instrumental attitude seems to underlie this commitment: given the difficulties of the defence sector, the European option seems not only the most viable but the most economically sensible for Italy. The objective seems to be to 'Europeanize' a problematic domestic issue and hope for a 'European rescue' of Italian defence. There is nothing bad or unprecedented in that, of course. It is just that it raises the question of whether from this instrumental calculus a genuine transformative process can ensue.

The case of Italy's policy vis-à-vis Iran, and its relation to that of Europe, is another indicative example. While in the 1990s Rome successfully exported its policy of dialogue to Europe, and thus multiplied the policy's impact on the process, its greatest concern over the last five years has been simply over the exclusion from the negotiations between the 'Big Three' and Tehran. More than evidence of the convergence around the EU, this seems to indicate a pure strategic calculus, especially in the context of a similar, threatened exclusion from a reformed UN Security Council. Italy's traditional concerns over rank and exclusion, in other words, are still alive and kicking. Note that this concern has animated Berlusconi's second and third mandates as well as Prodi's third – despite these two governments having different policies over Iran.

The predominant mode of Italy's 'Europeanization' thus seems rather opportunistic and instrumental, despite the country's abstract commitment to federalism. Italian foreign policy seems to be most Europeanized when most convenient for the country. Failing this condition, Italy cautiously yet determinedly turns to other options. The example of Italo-Russian relations is a case in point, and probably the most significant in terms of demonstrating how far Italy is determined to go to pursue its own interests when these do not happen to coincide with those of the EU.

If this is the rather complex picture emerging from the interaction between Italy, the EU and their foreign policies, what remains to be assessed are the factors influencing the outcomes of such an interaction. One has already been mentioned, and suitably qualified: as other analysts have found with respect to Europeanization in the field of economic and monetary policy, party politics is an important variable in the Italian case, and one usually underestimated in the Europeanization literature (Quaglia and Radaelli 2007: 925). Although arguably less decisive in the area of foreign policy than in economic matters, party politics does account for much of the variation and oscillations in the Italian foreign policy of the last two decades. However, this is hardly the only factor at play.

The EU and its member states do not interact in a vacuum: international relations do matter. The wave of instability affecting the Balkans in the 1990s, the Twin Tower attacks of 11 September 2001, the ensuing neoconservative and unilateralist turn in American foreign policy, the changing strategic scenario in regions such as the Middle East – all of these events have changed the range of options and limits for Italian foreign policy (as well as for the EU, of course). Thus, for instance, the hegemonic and unilateralist policies of the US have offered a tempting and, for some, irresistible incentive to bandwagon – hence, Berlusconi's Atlanticism. For a reactive country such as Italy, changes in the external constraint



are bound to affect foreign policy – once these changes are filtered through the operating paradigms and mindsets of the policymakers. Even keeping all other factors constant, Europeanization would still be influenced by what goes on in the world of international relations.

Another factor of significance, as demonstrated by the Italian case, is the strength of European foreign policy itself. It is not accidental that Italy's foreign policy has most strayed from EU positions when the Union has been most divided. Thus, its foreign policy over the Iraq crisis, or its bilateral relations with Russia. As the case of EMU demonstrated in the 1990s, unless the impulse coming from Europe is strong, consensual and involves effective sanctions, Italy will most likely find a crack in which to hide until the storm has passed. Occasionally, it will also try to widen the cracks more or less surreptitiously, so as to dilute even more pressure coming from Europe.

But aside from these background factors, at least two other sources of influence should be mentioned. Though the paper has offered limited evidence to substantiate this claim, Europeanization is more likely to happen when the Italian foreign policy/security establishment pushes for it. The case of ESDP is perhaps a good example of this: contrary to expectations, military officials both in Rome and Brussels have been rather vocal in supporting a common policy over defence and security. Not much can be said about Italian diplomats in Rome or Brussels, apart from the vague and perhaps a little outdated consideration that the Foreign Ministry has been traditionally considered the more pro-European of the two ministries. No study of the values, preferences and attitudes of Italy's diplomats vis-à-vis the world, let alone Europe, exists.

Lastly, this paper has suggested that an increasing influence on Italian foreign policy, including in its relations with the EU, is being exerted not so much by political actors but, rather, by big industrial groups such as ENI or FINMECCANICA. The former is effectively determining Italy's energy policy in Russia, while the latter has signed a number of important deals with other big European partners in the area of defence procurement, as part of ESDP. Given the dysfunctional state of Italy's current political system, it was to be expected that dynamic economic actors would soon build links with a wide range of political actors in power to secure support in the pursuit of their particular interests. The contradictory effect that this may have on Europeanization, let alone on an increasingly 'corporatist' Italian foreign policy, remains to be seen.

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## Notes

- 1 Gruppo di Riflessione Strategica (2008: 4), my translation. The *Rapporto* is not so much representative of public opinion, but rather indicative of the strategic preferences and overall attitudes of the foreign policy elites.
- 2 Interestingly, in the public debate as well as in some literature 'Europe' is frequently used to mean 'the EU'. In the domestic political discourse especially, the former is widely preferred because of its normative/political cachet as well as, one should perhaps add, of its vagueness. Every effort has been made in this paper to avoid any such ambiguities.
- 3 *Il Gattopardo* is a reference to the eponymous novel by Giuseppe di Lampedusa in which the main character famously advises that 'if we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change'.
- 4 For instance, see the views of Italy's President, in Napolitano (2006).
- 5 See Andreatta and Hill (2000) and Guzzini (1994), as well as the series of volumes published in the 1990s by Bergham Books entitled *Italian Politics*.
- 6 Here I follow the common practice of referring to the two coalitions as 'centre-right' and 'centre-left', though of course this distinction is vulnerable to various objections. One could legitimately question, for instance, to what extent Berlusconi's coalition is really centrist, instead of wholly right-wing. On the other hand, the centrist, post-Christian Democratic constituency still represents a 'middle ground' which is electorally vital to both coalitions.
- 7 For an account of two crises involving Italy's secret services and their relations with Washington (the so-called Calipari affair and the Nigergate issue) see Brighi (2007b).
- 8 *La Repubblica* (2007a, b); *Quotidiano Nazionale* (2007).
- 9 Prodi's past and extensive involvement with ENI, and with Eastern Europe, only facilitated things further. See Nicchia (2007), also *Corriere della Sera* (2006) and Galluzzo (2006).
- 10 For an overview of the military operations involving the 8,500 plus Italian soldiers now serving overseas, see Ministero della Difesa <http://www.difesa.it/Operazioni+Militari/> (accessed 4 February 2011).
- 11 *Corriere della Sera* (2008). See also the recent appointment of Ettore Segni as the EU's Special Representative for Afghanistan.
- 12 See the controversial letter published in *La Repubblica*, signed by eight ambassadors, pushing Rome to 'do more' in Afghanistan (*La Repubblica* 2007c). For a comment, see Silvestri (2007).