

Italian Domestic Politics: Constraint, Opportunity, or Scapegoat for the Country's European Policy?

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Federiga Bindi, PhD
Visiting Fellow
Center on the United States and Europe, *The Brookings Institution*, Washington DC
fbindi@brookings.edu
202-2383605 cell 202-2558820
Jean Monnet Chair in European Political Integration
Director, Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence, *University of Rome Tor Vergata*
federiga.bindi@uniroma2.it

Introduction

Italian foreign policy since WWII has been based on four pillars, each responding to one or more domestic needs:

- *European integration*: undoubtedly the major pillar of the Italian foreign policy – which initially responded to the need to secure the country's newly formed democratic institutions, ensure economic reconstruction and, last but not least, allow the definitive reinsertion of Italy on the international stage.
- *Atlantic integration*: the other main pillar of Italian foreign policy, initially ensuring economic reconstruction (the Marshall Plan) but essentially allowing Italy to maintain low defense expenditures.
- *USSR / Russia*: good relations with Moscow were initially needed domestically to contain the left parties' (Socialists and Communists) opposition to European integration and to Transatlantic relations. As time passed, Russia also became a major energy provider for Italy, as it is today.
- *The Mediterranean / Middle East*: this is a natural endeavor for Italy, given its geographic position, as well as major energy suppliers. More recently they also emerged a source of possible domestic instability due to the illegal flows of immigration.

- The *Balkans*, historically a troubled neighbor for Italy.

Despite the fact that these five policy domains have been given top priority by all Italian governments, there have been at times attempts to privilege either one over another and even to use them alternatively in order to rebalance Italy's influence on the European and/or world stage. There have also been cases in which the government attitude towards one or several of these areas of interests has been an important part of domestic *confrontation* (that is something different from "debate"). In this paper we will mainly focus on the first basket, European policies and integration.

The questions are therefore threefold:

1. Have European policies been an opportunity, a constraint or a scapegoat in Italian domestic policy making?
2. What have been the consequences for the effectiveness of Italy's action on the European stage?
3. What are the future prospects for Italian foreign policy?

For the sake of analysis, we can divide Italian European and foreign policy into three major periods, themselves divided into sub periods, which not incidentally coincide with three distinct phases of the Republic's history:

1. The *Cold War period (1945-1989) – The "First Republic"*: this period can be divided into two sub-periods: from the onset to the late 1970s; from the late 1970s to 1989, the dividing line being the Communist party's acceptance of the European integration process (and substantially of Transatlantic relations).
2. *The post-Cold War (1990-2008) – The "Second" Republic*: the end of the Cold War inaugurates a period of great domestic political change for Italy. From an international point of view, the end of the Cold War meant the need for Italy to redefine its role, interests and position in the new world. Not surprisingly, foreign policy once again became a divisive issue, and a means of domestic confrontation between the two main coalitions: Silvio Berlusconi and his (conservative) allies on one side; Romano Prodi and his (progressive) coalition on the other. The two coalitions underlined the relevance of the different policy areas – most notably European integration vs. Transatlantic integration - in different ways. Nevertheless, both progressive and

conservative political forces and leaders have had hard a time properly understanding just how much the changed geopolitical situation as to influence Italy's position and role in the world. For instance, it took almost twenty years for the Foreign Ministry – the so-called Farnesina - to produce a coherent reflection on Italy's interests and role in a mid-term prospective, with the so called "Italy 2020" paper¹.

3. *From 2008 – the “Third” Republic?*: the XVI legislature (2008) featured a major and unprecedented simplification of Italy's political party system. For the first time, there are only six parties in the Parliament and both the more extreme left and right parties have been left out. As a result, there has been a major change in the domestic rules of the political game, including an evolving discourse over European and foreign policy. This suggests that a “Third Republic” has started, notably bringing a less confrontational and more diplomatic way of defining the Italian foreign policy.

In the paragraphs that follow, we will discuss each of the three phases and relative subphases, with the aim – in the conclusions – of finding an answer to the three questions outlined above.

1.1 - The Cold War period: Center vs Left confrontation (1945-1979)

The first part of the Cold War period witnessed the creation of a number of multilateral organizations and institutions, of varying nature, both in Europe and worldwide. During this time, Italian governance and diplomatic action was successful in so far that Italy was – from the onset – incorporated into both the Council of Europe and the North Atlantic Treaty (in this case thanks to the French), a stark contrast from WWII's other main European loser, Germany.

The decision to link Italy firmly to the process of European integration was, however, essentially the decision of a small group of leaders, led by the President of the Council and head of the Christian Democrats, Alcide De Gasperi, and his Foreign Minister, Carlo Sforza. This choice was intrinsically linked to the decision to join the North Atlantic Pact in 1949. The DC – a party which would later become a champion of Europeanism – was, at the time, divided over the issue. Vera Capperucci (2003: 73) talks about three periods in the early DC

¹ http://www.esteri.it/mae/doc/MD_COMPLETO.doc

years: 1948-49, the Atlantic choice; 1950-1954, the Euro-Atlantic strategy; 1954-58, neo-Atlanticism. In the very early years of the republic, the left fringes of the DC leadership, led by Giuseppe Dossetti and Giovanni Gronchi, were in favor of keeping an equidistant relation between the two superpowers: the US and the USSR. They welcomed the prospect of a neutral, or non-aligned Italy. Though Italy's terrible economic conditions made it clear that the country needed American support – namely via the Marshall Plan – they felt it was important to show “dignity” in receiving it. The left-wing of the DC thus opposed the signature of the North Atlantic Pact. As the Communists and the Socialists were also expected to vote against the Pact (Capperucci, 2003), De Gasperi desperately needed all of his party's votes in parliament. In this light, he used Italy's inclusion in a European integration process (at the time represented by the Council of Europe) in order to “sell” Atlantic integration to the DC. In signing the North Atlantic Pact (April 4, 1949), De Gasperi underlined its political rather than military aspects. Also, soon afterwards (May 5, 1949), he signed the founding treaty of the Council of Europe. Meanwhile, during the same period,, his government also negotiated a commercial agreement with Moscow.

One year later, in 1950, the decision to join the European Coal and Steel Community was, once again, essentially a De Gasperi-Sforza effort. De Gasperi's idea was that Italy could better defend its national interests only within a policy of European solidarity (Telò, 1996: 195-196). In addition, involvement in supranational European institutions would help strengthen the domestic political system and the new-born democracy (Cotta, 1992: 206-207; Ferraris, 1992: 131). European integration was seen as a fundamental opportunity for the peninsula. Joining the ECSC, once again, was a political decision. Indeed, there were several reservations about technical issues. Piero Craveri (2003) talks about an external bond in relation to De Gasperi's vision of European integration: he says that, thanks to Italy's participation in the European Communities, De Gasperi aimed to make up for what he could not achieve on the national institutional level.

Despite some internal divisions in the 1960s and a new anti-European crisis in the 1970s, the European choice – strictly linked with the Atlantic one – came to represent a widespread and founding principle shared by the whole Christian Democratic party. In particular, in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, the party undertook a marked activism at the European level, also thanks to leaders like Giulio Andreotti or Emilio Colombo. However, as Niccolò Conti and

Luca Verzichelli (2005) point out, their style was more “reactive” than “proactive”; there was a distinct lack of continuity and of strategy in the DC’s European policy, especially as foreign policy was considered a minor issue in comparison to domestic politics.

As for the other parties of the governing coalition during De Gasperi’s time, the two smaller ones – the Liberals (PLI) and the Republicans (PRI) – were convinced supporters of European integration.

The two major parties of the left – PCI and PSI – felt differently. Since the very early days of the republic, both the Communists and the Socialists were very negative towards Atlantic and European issues, both perceived as a form of “submission” to the US (Ginsburg, 1990: 110-112). For a start, the Socialist leader Pietro Nenni considered foreign policy a dependent variable of domestic politics and felt that, as such, it should be used solely to serve Italian national interests. That meant, in his mind, that Italy should not enter the North Atlantic Treaty – which he perceived as a threat to the USSR and a number of other UN member states – or any European Community, including the Council of Europe.

This strict loyalty to the USSR isolated the Italian Socialist party from its fellow European. Indeed, so strong was Nenni’s opposition to European integration that in May 1950, the party explicitly forbid its members to join the European Federalist Movement (!). Yet, with the beginning of a gradual distension in East-West relations in the following years, Nenni began to think that new spaces for maneuvering were available to the PSI and slowly came to acknowledge the European status quo. The definitive break with USSR foreign policy came with the Suez and the Hungarian crises of 1956. Shortly thereafter, Nenni decided to name a party commission to study the question of the two new communities: the EEC and Euratom. Though not without criticism over how the government handled the negotiations, the commission recommended abstaining with respect to the EEC and voting in favor of Euratom (Scirocco, 2003). Meanwhile, Nenni had been co-opted into Jean Monnet’s *Comité d’Action* (Monnet, 1976). The change in the PSI’s approach to foreign policy then allowed the party to join the majority supporting the government in 1958 and to enter the government in 1963. From then on, they would remain pro-European.

1.2 - The Cold War period: Consensus (1979-1989)

The Communist Party's conversion to European values was slower and less linear. Today, in the national political culture, a myth surrounds the party – that the PCI has always been pro-European. However, the recent opening of the Moscow archives has allowed for a correct reconstruction of the facts by historians. The files in Moscow confirm the PCI's long dependence on the USSR – both from a policy and a monetary point of view (Guiso, 2003: 207). The Italian communist political discourse was centered on the defense of the Italian national interest – first and foremost, the geopolitical one (Guiso 2003: 219). The Communist party, however, had a fierce aversion to any form of European or Atlantic integration.

Some isolated communist leaders – like Giorgio Amendola or Gian Carlo Pajetta – at times showed a timid interest in initiatives launched by Christian Democrat leaders – such as Amintore Fanfani, or Giovanni Gronchi, with his *Ost-politik* – but that was about it. The events of 1956 and the brutal repression of the Hungarian uprising was a difficult moment for the PCI. Yet, unlike the PSI, the Communist party remained firmly alongside the USSR.

Though the PCI leader, Palmiro Togliatti, was quick to suppress any idea that departed from the party's official position, the first cracks in the party line were nevertheless starting to appear: the communist trade union (CGIL), for instance, felt the EEC would help the Italian economic recovery. Finally, after the 1962 Cuban missile crisis and the subsequent changes to the world scene, the PCI also started to change. When, in 1969, the first Communists were appointed to the European parliament, the PCI began to overhaul its foreign policy (Guiso, 2003). By the time of the first direct election of the European parliament (1979), the European Federalist leader, Altiero Spinelli, was elected as an independent in the electoral lists of the PCI, thus completing their total reversal, into a pro-European party.

Yet, such alignment on pro-European values of the various Italian parties did not result in a more proactive Italian European foreign policy; rather, a “de-politicization” of Italian foreign policy started to take place. Gradually, the EC became a non-issue in the Italian political arena. There are some exceptions: that was the case in 1985 (the Single Act) in 1990 (the preparation of the Maastricht Treaty), possibly the two most notable cases of resolute Italian action in the European integration process.

In the first semester of 1985 Italy held the EEC Presidency. The Christian Democrat leader Giulio Andreotti, who was foreign minister at the time, declared on January 16, 1985 to the European Parliament that the aim of the Italian Presidency was to convene an Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) to reform the EEC Treaty. However, at the European Council in Milan (June 28-29, 1985) the United Kingdom and Greece opposed strong resistance. After a tense and confusing debate, Andreotti finally proposed the summoning of an IGC and Craxi suggested to vote on the question – an unprecedented and very strong political move that was made possible by a effort to shore up Italian public opinion and by the political support of both Mitterand and Kohl. After the vote, the Vice-President of the Commission, Lord Cockfield, presented his *White Book* on the completion of an internal market. In the book, he listed approximately 300 measures which needed to be adopted, eventually reduced to 287, in order to achieve an internal market prior to December 31, 1992.

2 - The post Cold War (1990-2008)

1989 was a year of great changes in Eastern Europe, changes which were to have lasting consequences for both Europe and the world – though, this was not properly understood at the time in Italy and the country clearly underestimated the geopolitical implications. In June, *Solidarnosc* won the elections in Poland. In the meantime, the iron curtain between Austria and Hungary fell. During the summer, an increasing number of eastern Europeans arrived in Western Europe through Austria. In Czechoslovakia the protesters, lead by Havel and Dubček, obtained the resignation of the entire communist party. In December, Havel was elected President of the Republic. In Bulgaria, Živkov was forced to resign in November; the reformist Mladenov took his position and quickly announced liberal elections before May of the following year. In Romania, the opposition forces took control of the entire country by December. Ceausescu was captured in his attempt to escape and he was immediately tried and shot. However, the event symbolizing the end of the Cold War is the so called “Fall of the Berlin Wall”, which took place on November 9, when the doors from East Berlin to West Berlin were reopened. All these events and the subsequent end of the Cold War with its two opposing blocks were to affect Italy’s foreign policy and its role in the world. The first signs of change were when Italy was basically left alone in dealing with domestic instability in

1993 and again in 1997 and second when Italy was initially excluded from the “Contact Group” over former Yugoslavia (Andreatta 2008). Another sign of the changed times was what happened in the major political families in those years. Within the People’s Party (EPP), two parties had ruled above the others for a long time: the Italian DC and the German CDU-CSU. A crisis within the EPP began with the inclusion of the Spanish *Partido Popular*, which the Italians fiercely – yet uselessly – opposed. Then, when the first signs of collapse of the DC started to appear, the other EPP parties felt they could benefit by gaining a greater share of power. When the first split took place within the DC (1993), it was the new Italian Popular Party (PPI) that inherited a seat in the EPP. The party’s transformation and, most of all, its center-left orientation was neither understood nor welcomed by an EPP that was becoming increasingly more conservative and therefore quick to marginalize the PPI. . In the European Socialist family, then PSI leader Bettino Craxi fiercely opposed the entrance of the new Democratic Party of the Left (PDS) but was forced to give up in November 1992, at the Berlin Congress.

Despite these and other signs, the Italian political class was particularly slow in understanding that the world was changing for real and Italy consequently needed to adapt. The *Farnesina*, normally a top branch of the Italian Public Administration, also had difficulties in readapting its strategy, possibly paying the fact that it does not have a major strategic planning unit, like the other European countries. Yet, the very early 1990s were however a period in which Italy’s role in European policy making mattered greatly.

2.1 - The first years of the 1990s

On July 1st, 1990 – the same day that marked the beginning of the monetary union between the two German republics – Italy once again assumed the EEC Presidency. Shortly thereafter, Giulio Andreotti became President of the Council. The Italian presidency considered the preparation of the IGC on EMU (Economic and Monetary Union) its top priority. With this aim in mind, Andreotti proposed to hold a special informal Council in Rome (October 27-28th, 1990). Despite the UK’s opposition – specifically Margaret Thatcher’s opposition which ultimately led to her resignation and the swearing in of John Major (November 28th, 1990), the *Carli Report* on EMU was approved. In addition, Andreotti and its fellow foreign Minister, the socialist Gianni de Michelis, extensively used their personal and political networks in order to secure a successful European Council in Rome (December 14-15, 1990),

achieving the goal of calling for the opening of two IGCs - one on EMU and one on Political Union. Eventually, the IGC on Political Union was troubled by both internal dynamics and international events. The *Luxembourg Non-paper*, presented on April 17, 1992 was short lived while the Dutch *Draft Treaty* was promptly rejected. “Never an European Council has had such surcharged agenda”, wrote *The Economist* (7th-13th.12.1991, Vol.321, N.7736:34) in reference to the European Council of Maastricht (December 9-10, 1991). Because of the impossibility of reaching an agreement, the meeting of the European Council was suspended and only after a joint French-German- Italo-Benelux effort the *Treaty of Maastricht* was finally approved.

Despite Italy’s critical role in the European constitutive policies, during these years, it is the Italian dimension, as opposed to the European one, which appeals to national politicians. They – in a pure party-based logic – tend to consider “Euro-jobs” as (well paid) retirement or interim positions, just to hold them over until they can get back into the national political arena. The EC/EU has also been used by Italian politicians to legitimize their own actions (Cotta, 1992: 211). In fact, European constraints are often cited to justify otherwise unpopular fiscal and monetary measures. Some headlines from leading Italian newspapers make this clear: “The Twelve ask for tears and blood” (*La Repubblica*, May 5, 1992); “Privatization? It is imposed by the EC” (*Corriere della Sera*, August 3, 1992).

2. 2 - The I Berlusconi government (1994-95)

In 1994, Silvio Berlusconi, the leader of the new center-right coalition, became President of the Council. According to Gianni Bonvicini (1996), during the first centre-right government, between 1994 and 1995, a greater assertiveness came to characterize Italian foreign policy and affect the balance between Europe and the USA. In his programmatic speech to the Italian parliament, Silvio Berlusconi declared that Italy was to play “a leading role” in the European Union (*Il Sole 24 Ore*, May 17, 1994), and his Minister for Agriculture, Adriana Poli Bortone, affirmed that Italy was going “to play hard in Brussels” (*Il Sole 24 Ore*, July 16, 94). Most of all, Foreign Minister Antonio Martini, a member of Margaret Thatcher’s Club de Bruges, favored a position of “qualified integrationism” and was critical of the nascent Economic and Monetary Europe (Brighi, 2008). A number of confrontational episodes took place in this phase, too. For example, Italy initially opposed Slovenia’s EU membership bid (*Il Sole 24 Ore*, July 17, 1994 and August 31, 1994) and almost created a diplomatic incident when the

German CDU proposed a two-speed Europe, placing Italy in the circle of “late comers” (*Il Sole 24 Ore*, September 3, 1994). This, together with the international political isolation of the Berlusconi I government, relegated Italy to a lesser role in the European arena.

As his nine months in office clearly demonstrated – isolation at the European level was a potential danger to his future political goals; therefore, while in opposition, Berlusconi made a tremendous effort to bring his own party, Forza Italia, into the EPP. That was done by using both traditional political channels well as through Berlusconi’s own “personal diplomacy.” The post Christian Democrat progressive party, PPI, put up a fight, but it was far too late. Meanwhile, Pier Ferdinando Casini’s small party (UDC) had become a member of the EPP, too. For some time, Lamberto Dini’s and Mario Segni’s tiny parties were part of the EPP as well and, in 2001, Clemente Mastella’s essentially southern party (UDEUR) was finally accepted, too. All these Italian parties – in itself a phenomenon difficult to understand abroad – tended in these years to seize the occasion of EPP meetings to fight over domestic matters, an attitude that severely undermined their consideration in Europe. Therefore, though *Forza Italia* enjoys relevant strength within the EPP due to its size, the prestige and power of the former DC have been lost forever.

2.3 - The I Prodi government and the other progressive government (1999-2001)

In 1996, national elections were won by the center-left Olive Tree coalition. The I Prodi government made a concerted effort to relocate Italy in the European arena, in particular by focusing on economic reforms needed to successfully fulfill the EMU criteria. Yet Prodi’s handling of the EU presidency (1996) was far less successful than that of previous ones. Also, the Prodi I government suffered from the anti-European stance of its post-communist ally, *Rifondazione Comunista*. Rifondazione’s votes were necessary in the Chamber of Deputies to Prodi’s survival, but the party, born of a split within PDS and still believing in communism as a viable solution, had reverted to the original communist opposition to both European integration and NATO. Rifondazione’s stance on Europe therefore caused trouble, particularly with regards to the economic reforms Italy was required undertake in order to follow the path towards EMU. For these reasons, the Rifondazione aligned itself with the Northern League – a far-right party – in opposition to EU integration, thus definitively breaking the general consensus on European integration that had characterized the Italian political system since the early 1980s.

Yet, with Europe back as the main scene in both foreign and domestic politics, relations with the US suffered various blows: from Rome's frequent opening to Libya, North Korea and Iran –all of which irritated Washington; to the Ocalan affair and the Cermis incident; to the negotiations in Rambouillet over Serbia – which some have defined as “critical Atlanticism” (Brighi 2008). The intervention in Kosovo, supported by both political coalitions in Parliament, somehow reversed this trend, but it will not be without domestic political costs within the centre-left political coalition where both the communist and the Catholics saw their inherent pacifism challenged.

2.4 - The II and III Berlusconi Government (2001-2006)

Silvio Berlusconi went back in power in 2001, this time with a stronger parliamentary majority which allowed him more freedom in foreign policy than ever any government before. In particular, he was definitely more pro-American than any of his predecessors, at the expense of Italian relations with traditional European and Middle East partners. According to Andreatta (2008: 175), that led to an “unbalanced foreign policy in which bilateral relations with the Bush administration took precedent over multilateral relations with Europe, leading to frequent tensions with EU institutions and partners [...] Most prominent was the support given to the Bush Administration's global war on terror after 9/11, which implied significant and unprecedented positions.” Berlusconi also invested much of his “personal diplomacy” to build preferential relations with Russia President Vladimir Putin and invested heavily in relations with countries like the UK and Israel. According to Elisabetta Brighi (2008: 104): the government seemed to believe that “a more assertive Italian foreign policy passed from Washington thus equating Atlanticism with nationalism [...while...] a significant number of influential ministers [...] have professed a particularly complex brand of euro-scepticism which the Prime Minister has qualified as Eurorealism.”

During the beginning of the government, relations with the EU were – to say the least – troubled. For a start, Silvio Berlusconi's decision to name his Vice President of the Council Gianfranco Fini as his own representative in the Convention led to a political turmoil in some European capitals. The Belgian government in fact contested the nomination, saying that Vice President Giuliano Amato was to be considered as the representative of the Italian Government, as Mr. Dehaene – the other Vice President – was to be considered for the

Belgian Government. Both Mr. Berlusconi and Sen. Amato refused such a reading. After considerable political and diplomatic tension, the question was finally settled with Mr. Fini's confirmation and the official explanation that the Conclusions of the European Council read differently in the Dutch and Italian versions (!). However, the Convention experience was fundamental in finalizing Fini's transition to pro-European values and, in turn, to have the other member states accept him and his own party as a regular, respected player. The nomination thus proved to be a successful move by President Berlusconi both domestically and internationally.

Domestic politics also influenced Italy's perception abroad. When the II Berlusconi government was first formed, Ambassador Renato Ruggiero was appointed as Foreign Minister. A former top diplomat, Ruggiero had served as Farnesina Secretary-General and Secretary-General of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). He was a very close friend of Fiat's President Umberto Agnelli, and his nomination was welcomed in Italy and abroad alike as a sign of continuity in Italian foreign policy. Domestically he was also perceived as a counter balance to the presence in the government of anti-European forces. However, clashes between the Foreign Minister and the rest of the government were soon to emerge, eventually leading to Ambassador Ruggiero's resignation. Silvio Berlusconi, therefore, assumed at *interim* the position of Foreign Ministry, from January 2002 to November 2002, making him for a time both President of the Council and Foreign Minister when the European Convention started its work. However, by the end of the first year of negotiations on the Convention, with the Italian Presidency approaching and the situation becoming unmanageable, Berlusconi finally left the seat to the then Minister of Public Function, Franco Frattini. When first named, Frattini was generally perceived as a Berlusconi yes-man, who would let him continue to lead Italian foreign policy from the Presidency of the Council. This, however, turned out to be a false expectation. A former first-of-the-class guy with an impressive (legal) curricula in the Italian Public Administration, Frattini soon acquired in-depth knowledge of the EU technical dossiers, fit well into Farnesina's diplomatic agenda, and proved to be an excellent and dedicated Foreign Minister.

Yet Berlusconi's government was ultimately not able to close a deal on the EU's so-called Constitutional Treaty. From the start, the negotiations (2003) did not prove easy. The Italian EU presidency sought to underscore the continuity between the Convention and the IGC.

However, during the summer, the Member States had examined the Convention's proposals and it had become clear that some points were problematic and would be re-discussed by the IGC. Indeed, the IGC was overall meticulously followed by the Farnesina. The same can be said of the concluding European Council. The Intergovernmental Conference was to be preceded by the customary quarterly meeting of the European Council. Carefully prepared, that part of the meeting did not last beyond the morning of December 12. Then it was time to move to the IGC. The Presidency recognized that the only real problem remaining was Qualified Majority Voting (QMV) in the Council, due in particular to the opposition of both Spain and Poland (despite not yet being an EU Member State). Its strategy was, therefore, to reach a compromise on this point above all, hoping that in turn, this would make it easier to resolve the other outstanding problems under negotiation. However, all efforts were useless. Faced with a deadlock situation, the Italian Presidency found itself unable to make a balanced proposal which was acceptable to everyone. It therefore remained for the Presidency to state that it was impossible to reach an overall agreement. The Intergovernmental Conference, accordingly, issued a statement declaring that negotiations had failed and asking the Irish Presidency to continue consultations. Despite the positive results of the Convention and also of the IGC negotiations themselves, ultimately, the IGC, which began on 4 October 2003, concluded for the first time ever with a failure. It had been impossible to reach an agreement on the voting regulations for the Council, with Spain and Poland on the one side—which were against changing the rules of Nice—and Germany and France on the other. The major difference at the European Council of Brussels on December 12-13, 2004 was that the Italian Presidency lacked the support of both France and Germany, both of which had been fundamental in the Italian Presidencies in 1984 and 1990 when Italy had to square the circle. The political isolation of the President-in-Office therefore resulted in the failure of the IGC.

Another source of friction and isolation came for the government on the issue of the European arrest warrant. The Italian government strenuously, yet uselessly, was opposed to it, both while it was being negotiated (2001) and when the time came for implementation into the national juridical system (2004).

2.5 - *The II Prodi Government (2006-2008)*

The II Prodi (2006-2008) government – whose first move in foreign politics was the withdrawal of Italian troops from Iraq (*Repubblica*, 3.6.2006) – sought to relocate European integration back at the center of Italian foreign policy. Yet, in doing he followed the tradition and the strategic approach of the Christian Democrat governments of the past, apparently without understanding that a new political landscape demanded new strategies– even along the lines of the traditional pro-European Italian stance. In his programmatic speech in front of the Parliament (18.5.2006), Prodi affirmed that the Italian interests and the European ones coincided (!)². An Eurocentric vision of the Italian foreign policy that however re-proposed the ambiguity of a pro-European foreign policy but alongside a substantial inaction in day to day European affairs. The case involving the redistribution of seats in the post-2009 European Parliament confirms this ambiguity. The number of Italian MEPs is scheduled to be cut starting with the 2009 European elections. This recounting – done by the European Parliament – was based on the number of residents rather than the number of voters present in each member state,. This meant that Italy would have six MEPS less then with the previous system but, what was worse, France would have more MEPs that Italy (sic!). Incidentally, the *rapporteur* in the European Parliament was the French MEP Alain Lamassoure. The report was approved by the European Council meeting held in Brussels on June 21-23, 2007,yet, when this was discovered by the Italian press, turmoil broke out, with some commentators even asking for Italy to use their veto. There was additional outcry in October 2007 when it was the turn of the European Parliament to vote on the new provisions. Eventually, a solution was found by adding one more MEP to the final counting (the formula being 750 plus the President) and attributing that extra one to Italy. Nobody, however, went deeper in finding out *how* the initial decision was made by the European Council: hadn't the two Italian representatives (Romano Prodi and his Foreign Minister D'Alema) realized what was going on? Had they left the meeting rooms, as rumours suggest, to resolve a domestic political problem? Or were they aware of what was happening, but hoped that it would go unnoticed

² Saremo guidati da scelte precise nella nostra politica estera: scegliamo l'Europa ed il processo di integrazione europea come ambito essenziale della politica italiana [...] L'Europa è la carta sulla quale l'Italia, uscita distrutta dalla guerra, ha scommesso il proprio avvenire. Fino a quando ha fatto questa scommessa ha vinto. Ma anche l'Europa conosce una fase di crisi, che noi non sottovalutiamo. E l'Europa ha bisogno di noi. Ha bisogno di un'Italia che si rimetta nel solco della sua grande tradizione. Dobbiamo dare subito un nuovo slancio al processo di integrazione, attraverso iniziative ed azioni concrete che diano risposte tangibili alle attese di centinaia di milioni di europei. [...] È nostra convinzione che interesse nazionale e interesse europeo siano una cosa sola. È nostra convinzione che l'Italia conti, anche nei rapporti con il grande alleato, solo se conta in Europa. E noi lavoreremo per ricollocare l'Italia tra i paesi guida dell'Europa.” (www.camera.it)

back home? Whichever of these versions is correct, it certainly was not an example of Italy's brilliance in action. And the situation appears even worse if we analyze the Italian MEPs' voting conduct on the European Parliament's Constitutional Affairs Committee: despite all the noisy protests voiced by the Italian government and the Italian media over the MEP issue, when a vote was actually taken on the Lamassoure Report to approve the cut in the number of Italian deputies (on October 11, 2007), the only Italian representative present was MEP Riccardo Ventre (www.europarl.europa.eu).

Yet, the II Prodi government has the merit of having brought about the first comprehensive reflection on the future of Italian foreign policy, with the so-called "Italia 2020" paper. In it, Europe again has a central role, though due to the precocious end of the government, the paper was left somewhat unfinished. With regard to Europe, the main problems the paper identifies are how to maintain co-leadership within the EU and how to preserve national interests in an enlarged EU. The paper also identifies three strategic policy areas that are most important to for Italy: EMU, defense, immigration and home security – all areas in which it is perceived that Italy can have a greater role. The whole paper, in fact, has a main theme of how to give Italy greater relevance in international relations; for instance, it proposes, in the field of defense, to create a "group of Six:" France, UK; Germany, Italy, Spain; Poland – a clear attempt to get back into the so-called "Direttorio." The link between domestic politics and European politics is openly stated: according to the paper, only domestic stability will give Italy back its role in Europe³.

3 - From 2008 – the "Third" Republic?

After less than two years, Silvio Berlusconi went back to government with an even more comfortable majority than in the past and so far, he seems willing to undertake the changes he was unable to bring about during his previous times in government. This means that he needs to focus primarily on domestic policies. Consequently, he has substantially delegated the lead of Italian foreign policy to Franco Frattini, the now experienced Foreign Minister.

³ "Lo sforzo per costruire una immagine più coerente – concreta e continuativa – dell'Italia in Europa, passa anzitutto da una maggiore solidità interna: da molti punti di vista, infatti, la politica europea non è più politica estera ma è ormai politica "inter-domestica" (*intermestic*). Se la vecchia teoria del "vincolo esterno" si basava sull'assunto – per lungo tempo corretto - che l'Italia potesse derivare forza interna dalla sua appartenenza all'Europa, oggi il vincolo appare rovesciato: solo se si darà una maggiore solidità interna – superando le difficoltà e le carenze sopra accennate - l'Italia manterrà anche un peso vero in Europa. Avrà cioè la capacità di influire su uno dei livelli decisivi di governo di politiche che in quanto europee sono anche domestiche" (MAE 2008: 15)

In his programmatic speech to the Parliament, Berlusconi, in fact, only briefly mentioned the future of Italian Foreign and European policies⁴, thus leaving his Foreign Minister Franco Frattini the task of specifying the new direction of Italian foreign policy.

In presenting Italy's foreign policy to the Italian Parliament (July 2nd 2008), Frattini⁵ confirmed the impressions of those who noticed the fundamental impact his time spent as European Commissioner had on his action and values. Despite touching upon the role of Italy in the rest of the world – namely Transatlantic relations, Middle East, relations with Russia, the other international multilateral forums etc most of Frattini speech was in fact devoted to the future of European integration and the role of Italy within the EU; this was defined as the first priority of Italian foreign policy. In this way, Frattini demonstrated Italy's willingness to end the longstanding dispute between the two coalitions over European integration⁶.

Conclusions

In the introduction, we identified three questions that needed to be answered:

1. Have European policies been an opportunity, a constraint or a scapegoat for Italian domestic policy making?
2. What have been the consequences for the effectiveness of Italy's action on the European stage?
3. What are the future prospects for Italian foreign policy?

We shall now try to summarize and find the answers.

⁴ “Il ruolo dell'Italia in Europa e nel mondo [...] saranno la bussola della nostra politica come Paese fondatore del progetto europeo, come grande nazione mediterranea, naturalmente chiamata alla cooperazione tra le due sponde del nostro mare e come pilastro dell'amicizia tra Europa e Stati Uniti d'America”
http://banchedati.camera.it/tiap_16/ctrStartPage.asp

⁵http://www.esteri.it/MAE/IT/Stampa/Sala_Stampa/Interventi/2008/07/20080709_Frattini_CommCong.htm?LANG=IT

⁶ The major break with the previous government is this time thus not the attitude toward Europe or the US, rather toward the Middle East – a domain the past Foreign Minister Massimo D'Alema knew particularly well and enjoyed dealing with - toward a more decisively favorable attitude vis-à-vis Israel

Have European policies been an opportunity or a constraint in the Italian domestic policy making?

From the previous analysis, one finds that European policy has been primarily an opportunity for Italian domestic policy making and only to a lesser extent a constraint or a scapegoat as seen in the table below.

Period	Governments	Opportunity	Constraint	Scapegoat
Early 1950	De Gasperi(s)	X	x	
1970s-1989	Various	X		
Early 1990s	Various	X		x
1994-95	I Berlusconi		x	
1996-2001	I Prodi, D'Alema, Amato	X	x	x
2001-06	II & III Berlusconi	X	x	
2006-08	II Prodi		x	
2008 -	IV Berlusconi	X		

Membership in the Communities (and Atlantic integration) in the 1950s was an opportunity for domestic politics, both from a political and an economic point of view. It was however also a constraint, as it meant the newly born Republic would have to engage in a stricter relationship with the USSR in order to appease internal opposition on the left.

In the late 1970s, it is the Communist party's turn to "use" European integration as a means of changing -party policy toward a more independent stance vis-à-vis the USSR and in favor of Enrico Berlinguer's "Eurocommunism".

In the early 1990s, the process of European integration presented both with a major opportunity – modernizing the country and reducing its huge public deficit by virtue of Italy's participation in the Single Market and in the European Monetary Union. But for the first time, European integration became a scapegoat as leaders blamed on the EEC/EU to justify the cost of the reforms.

The opportunity of using the EU both as an opportunity and a scapegoat in the road to public economic reforms also characterized the I Prodi government and the subsequent D'Alema and Amato II governments (1996-2001). Yet, the EU was also a major source of constraint due to the intransigence of the left parties of the coalition, in particular of the post-communist

Rifondazione Comunista. This constraint surfaced again in the short 2006-2008 Prodi II government.

During the brief I Berlusconi government (1994-95), the EU was essentially a constraint due to its isolation and inability to properly pass its own treaty in Europe, a problem that also characterized the II and III Berlusconi governments (2001-2006). Yet in this phase the EU also provided a major source of domestic opportunity for Forza Italia's leader. On the one hand, he used Forza Italia's membership in the EPP as a source of legitimacy, both domestically and internationally, but he also used the European Convention as a way to Europeanize and legitimize Gianfranco Fini, the otherwise contested leader of the post-fascist National Alliance.

As for the recent IV Berlusconi government, there is still not enough evidence for a significant evaluation. However, once again Europe seems to be, above all, provide opportunities for domestic politics. The Foreign Minister, Franco Frattini, has gone back to the post with a renewed European legitimacy after his time spent at the European Commission, and that is certainly benefitting both the government's position in Europe and the political discourse at home.

Disaggregating and re-aggregating the data from another perspective, one finds that - if we compare the governments of the two major Italian coalitions (Berlusconi I, II; III and partially IV) - suprisingly, that the EU has been a source of opportunity more for the Berlusconi governments than to Prodi & Co, for whom it has been more of a constraint – due primarily to the contradictory domestic action of the left fringes of the government coalitions. Moreover, for the Berlusconi governments, constraint has been essentially of an international nature (namely its isolation on the European stage) which at times forced Italy to change its position, at the price of strong domestic reactions, both within and outside the government coalition (for example, in the case of the European arrest warrant).

Which have been the consequences for the effectiveness of Italy's action on the European stage?

Our analysis has shown that Italy was more relevant in the European community when its foreign policy's was constrained by the Cold War, and, consequently, European policy

making has become the major arena for action. Italy was particularly effective in the late 1980s and very early 1990s when the domestic the political framework was characterized by a shared consensus on Italy's participation and goals in the European integration process of European. That is particularly true for high politics, while in low politics (the day to day policy making) the shared consensus paradoxically lead to a more passive attitude, one that made Sergio Romano (1994, 114) affirm that Italians are pro-European in the same way they are catholic: Europe is a religious icon in front of which politicians briefly kneel before talking about other things.

Which is the possible future prospective?

When we compare that periods 1985 to the early 1990s and late 1990s to late 2000s, the paradox we find is that Italy was more influential in the European integration process in the first period, when governmental instability was higher than it has been in most recent times⁷.

Hence, the conclusion that has to be drawn is that **it is not domestic instability that negatively affects the conduct of a country's foreign policy (in our case European policy), rather it is the lack of consensus amongst the country's political elites on the goals to be achieved in foreign policy.** What does that means in Italian terms, and specifically in relation to its action within the EU?

Carlo Maria Santoro (1991) once affirmed that Italy, a middle size power, did not know how to choose between being the "last of the great powers" or the "largest of the smaller powers." In addition to this, in the last 10-15 years, the Italian governments have used European politics as a source of domestic fighting rather than a source of internal cohesion. Only in very recent times, the trend seems to have been reversed, as the unanimous vote over the Lisbon Treaty in the Italian Parliament (July 31, 2008) suggests.

⁷ Though researches shows how the country's frequent changes of government were in fact counterbalanced by the stable presence of a solid core of politicians. Some 16 figures almost always held one or another cabinet post – Senator Giulio Andreotti is possibly the best example of this – and thus enjoyed personal negotiating credibility in Community circles, Cfr Frogner in Blondel J. and Muller-Rommel F., eds., 1991: *Cabinets in Western Europe*, Houndsmills, Basingstoke and Macmillan, London, pp.123-124; Bakema, W.E. in Blondel J. and Thiébault J.-L., eds., 1991: *The Profession of Government Minister in Western Europe*, MacMillan, London, pp. 77-85 e 92-93.

In the enlarged European Union, Italy can, therefore, still be a major actor, yet with the following conditions.

First, there must be a consensus on the ultimate goal of Italy's European and international politics, which should be the object of a reasoned domestic debate and, consequently, of as much consensus as possible amongst the leading political forces. Such an effort should also include the planning of priorities in the short term but also from a middle and long term prospective – it is, for instance, a real pity that the work of the Italy 2020 paper will unlikely have a follow-up.

Second, all resources available must be usefully employed: the country needs to present itself as a coherent “system” rather than as a constellation of different and sometimes contradictory actors. That means that there is a strong need for domestic coordination (something the Italy 2020 paper also acknowledged) involving the different stakeholders, both governmental and non governmental. Expertise among the ranks of the opposition should be employed too, when useful for the country. This is especially true whenever the government has the chance to get an Italian elected into an EU position. In such situations, the best candidate should be chosen regardless of political affiliation, similar to what José María Aznar successfully did in nominating Xavier Solana to the post of Mr. PESC. The government also needs to intervene in training and in the motivation of the people who represent the government at the various levels and in the different EU institutions and bodies, and it has to try hard to create at least an *esprit de corp* among Italian EU officials.

Third, the transformation of the domestic political situation must be completed. The major result of the 2008 elections has been a drastic and much needed simplification of the Italian political framework. For the first time ever, one finds in Parliament only six parties, with both the extreme left and right parties failing to win enough votes to join. Because of this, we can talk about a Third Republic. Much will depend on the electoral law that will be chosen for the forthcoming European elections. Should the new electoral law bring a 4% or more threshold, the simplification of the Italian political system might be permanent.

According to Filippo Andreatta (2008: 179) “[in a political scenario like the pre-2008 one] “not only Italy will be condemned to have a changing foreign policy according to the coalition

which will rule the country at any given time, but also the inherent fragilities of the coalitions, and the lack of support from the opposition at critical junctures, will guarantee that foreign policy will be erratic even between one election and the next.”

Following the 2008 legislative elections and for the first time in Republican history, Italy’s European and foreign policies have been freed from both geopolitical and domestic constraints. Italy is now finally able to define its own foreign and European policy through a civil and constructive dialogue with the opposition, and fully use the Italian system in conducting its policies – that is to say using the whole net of traditional and public diplomacy the country has⁸ Whether this will be finally achieved whether the country will choose to divide on petty issues over foreign policy and in doing so undermine Italy’s possible role in foreign policy – remains to be seen.

⁸ Interestingly enough, in his programmatic speech to the Parliament’s Foreign Policy Committee (2nd July 2008), Minister Frattini acknowledge the usefulness of his predecessor’s network in Middle East (www.esteri.it).

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