



# ATLANTIC FUTURE

## POLICY BRIEF

**An Italian Perspective on the 'Atlantic Space':  
TTIP, Trust-Building and the Future of Global Normative Leadership**

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### ABSTRACT

This paper highlights perceptions, ideas and concerns regarding the Atlantic space held by 20 Italian opinion shapers and policy makers, interviewed by the IAI research team from October 2014 to February 2015.

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According to Italian interviewees the Atlantic is most certainly a relevant context. Yet, a perceived lack of a general vision regarding the multifaceted aspects of pan-Atlantic cooperation is strongly felt. On the contrary, interviewees singled out specific themes within the Atlantic context as particularly relevant. This paper attempts to put together the main ideas collected in order to provide a more general framework of the Italian view of the Atlantic context and its future.

## Interests vs values

On balance, Italians tend to believe in the existence of shared interests across the Atlantic space and the emergence of a general trend towards greater cooperation, helped along by the forces of globalization and greater interconnectedness. It is with a pragmatic vision that Italy recognises the need for synergic cooperation in the Atlantic, both with rising powers and traditional partners. The desire expressed by the Italian interviewees is that of a more fruitful cooperation across all sides of the Atlantic Ocean, and of course across Europe itself.

A widespread perception, though, reveals that in the eye of Italy's main public opinion and policy shapers, important cleavages still exist. Heavily skeptic about the possible emergence of shared norms and values, Italians clearly believe that identifying common values in the Atlantic would require stretching reality. There are basic common values, overall those most shared are certainly democracy and the rule of law, but these are rather universal and to no extent constitute the foundation for a stronger pan-Atlantic vision or partnership.

## Obstacles to cooperation and priorities

The absence of a shared sense of direction, though significant, is not, according to the interviewees, what mostly hinders pan-Atlantic cooperation. Indeed the US – a historical partner – is considered to hold a number of diametrically opposed views and values vis-à-vis Italy and the EU; in matters regarding the protection of the individual or in relation to capital punishment, for example. The real challenge resides instead in the impossibility of the actors in the Atlantic to conceive of the Atlantic space as a space for cooperation and for the elaboration of a positive win-win dynamic.

A problem which applies to the transatlantic relationship as well, which Italians overwhelmingly believe to be the “foundational link” of the Atlantic. Indeed the vision from Italy states that were the EU and the US to compete they would only further complicate their global positioning. And yet the unequal relationship between the US and the EU, general mistrust and a tendency to view Europe as little more than “a market”, is undermining transatlantic cooperation which some hopefuls believe could be a stepping stone towards broader cooperation across the Atlantic.

At the centre of the bull's eye and the eye of Italian media, public figures, policy makers and private companies is the much disputed TTIP, an undeniable priority in the Italian, EU and US agendas, deemed in itself to be the litmus test for whether the transatlantic relationship can be successfully revived. To some extent the TTIP is seen as an answer to the emergence of the Asia-Pacific. In this respect, many pointed out the Fiat-Chrysler deal as an example of successful cooperation among private sectors, which might be fostered by the TTIP. Nonetheless, whilst acutely conscious of the importance of such a deal, severe degrees of mistrust and a strong perception of a lack of transparency in the negotiation process fuels Italian popular controversy, stemming hopes of concluding negotiations within the next half a decade.

## TTIP: not just economics

Most interestingly perhaps, and specifically with regards to the consequences for the wider Atlantic area, is the Italian perception of the TTIP as not just an economic opportunity. Whilst interested in the economics of it all, what seems to emerge as the overarching ambition for the EU and Italy itself – the latter's interests deemed all but coinciding with those of the EU – is that of maintaining relevance over global norm-setting. On the one hand, the EU has always been hailed for its normative power, on the other, Italy's understanding of the future economic influence of the EU is modest. A trade agreement is thus no longer an issue of mere economic interest but to the contrary is invested with a number of controversial value-ridden consequences, within the framework of which Italians recognize the US as their only real ally for maintaining global leadership over values and norms. Globalisation has indeed not only connected markets but societies and the Italians realize that negotiating trade deals on, say, GMOs or Shale gas, is not a mere exercise in balancing economic winners and losers, but a question which touches upon organizing society, its values and ways of living. In this context, and in the race for the control of the global governance of rules, norms and values, albeit grudgingly, the Italian view looks West and worries to the East.