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**EU-27 WATCH NO. 8 - ITALY**

*by Maria Luisa Pozzone*

IAI's Contribution to "EU-27 Watch"

## EU-27 WATCH NO. 8 – ITALY

by Maria Luisa Pozzone

**I. A year of opportunities****I.1. How does the future of the EU look like after the Irish ‘No’?****Linkage between European citizens and EU institutions has to be restored***The Conclusions of December 2008 European Council on the fate of the Lisbon Treaty*

In Italy, the reactions to the European Council of December 2008 have been quite positive at the political level. The Italian Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, affirmed that it was a success for the European Council to reject the Irish request for a new ratification process from all EU member states. In his opinion, the Brussels Summit proved very useful for finding a compromise on this difficult issue since it “worked hard to give Ireland the possibility to hold a new referendum on the treaty”<sup>1</sup>. For this purpose, he said the EU had to “accept some conditions” such as maintaining a 27-member Commission, allowing the non participation of Ireland in the EU military missions and giving it some assurances on ethical matters and family law.<sup>2</sup>

However, the reaction of the Italian press to the European Council’s decision was less enthusiastic, because it showed the ‘weakness’ of the EU on such an important matter. As an Italian analyst wrote, quoting a popular phrase by opera singer Maria Callas, “once you start making too many concessions, you’ll never be able to stop, since people will expect you to do so automatically”<sup>3</sup>. Some commentators felt that the December European Council’s conclusions are somehow contradictory. In fact, by keeping the number of Commissioners at 27, the Council indirectly put a limit on the Treaty of Lisbon, which called for a smaller Commission in order for it to work properly.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, some Italian journalists were not convinced that the Irish people will vote ‘Yes’ next time round, as happened with the second referendum on the Treaty of Nice in 2002.<sup>5</sup> At present, the situation in Ireland is totally different from six years ago. First of all, the economic situation in the country is now much worse with Ireland experiencing a recession, while its economy was growing rapidly in 2002. Secondly, the

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<sup>1</sup> See: UE/Vertice: Berlusconi, buon risultato non tornare su Lisbona, ASCA, 12 December 2008, available at: <http://it.notizie.yahoo.com/19/20081212/tpl-ue-vertice-berlusconi-buon-risultato-1204c2b.html> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> C. Zagari: Il caso irlandese e il rischio del “Trattato zero”, Il Tempo, 16 December 2008, available at: [http://iltempo.ilsole24ore.com/2008/12/16/965268-caso\\_irlandese\\_rischio\\_trattato\\_zero.shtml](http://iltempo.ilsole24ore.com/2008/12/16/965268-caso_irlandese_rischio_trattato_zero.shtml) (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Il Sole 24 Ore: L’Irlanda tornerà a votare in ottobre sul Trattato UE, 12 December 2008, available at: [http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/SoleOnLine4/Economia\\_e\\_Lavoro/2008/12/irlanda-trattato-ue.shtml?uuid=ddbeb94c-c824-11dd-baf9-fbc7a4fc4e23&DocRulesView=Libero](http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/SoleOnLine4/Economia_e_Lavoro/2008/12/irlanda-trattato-ue.shtml?uuid=ddbeb94c-c824-11dd-baf9-fbc7a4fc4e23&DocRulesView=Libero) (last access: 25 January 2009).

EU's popularity among the Irish population is much lower than before. Finally, the 'No' front in Ireland is very well organized and deeply-rooted.<sup>6</sup>

In conclusion, there seems to be a sort of discrepancy between the government and the public opinion in the way they perceived the December 2008 European Council's conclusions. This gap will probably narrow in the next months when the Irish vote again.

*The upcoming European Parliament elections in June 2009*

There has been a lot of debate in Italy about the upcoming European Parliament elections both at the political and academic level. Last summer, some proposals were made on how to change the current electoral system to guarantee fair representation of European citizens.

The Minister for Normative Simplification, Roberto Calderoli, suggested a new electoral system with a 4 percent threshold, only one preference instead of the previous three and ten constituencies (at present they are five).<sup>7</sup> In September 2008, the government party, Popolo della Libertà (PdL), proposed introducing a 5 percent threshold and an electoral system with closed party lists,<sup>8</sup> as well as abolishing preferential votes. The reasons for this choice were several. The proposal to introduce a higher threshold was meant to avoid party fragmentation inside the parliament. Moreover, as Italian Prime Minister Berlusconi declared, "the fixed party list would make it possible to have professionals who can best represent the country inside the European Parliament committees"<sup>9</sup>. However, this position was not shared by other parties and by many representatives of the Italian press. The opposition party, Partito Democratico (PD), was in favour of a 3 percent threshold and maintaining the possibility for voters to express their preferences for individual candidates. The centrist party, Unione dei Democratici Cristiani e Democratici di Centro (UDC), was in favour of preferences and the lower threshold as well. In fact, had the PdL proposal been approved in parliament, it would have been difficult for the UDC to send any representative to the European Parliament.

When these proposals were launched, many Italian journalists and representatives of the research community were against the abolition of preferences. Michele Comelli and Jean-Pierre Darnis, from the "International Affairs Institute", wrote that the abolition of the preference system would "make it impossible for the voters to choose their representatives in the European Parliament directly"<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, some journalists argued that, while in other EU member states, such as Germany, democratic procedures have been established inside the parties to choose their candidates; in Italy however, "the fixed party list mechanism of the national electoral law has boosted [...] the use of co-optation from above, without the introduction of any democratic procedure either inside or outside the parties"<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> L. Fuccaro: Soglia al 4% e una preferenza – Europee, il testo del governo, Corriere della Sera, 31 July 2008.

<sup>8</sup> With a system of closed party lists, which does not allow the voters to express their preferences for single candidates, the candidates at the top of the winning electoral list get elected.

<sup>9</sup> See: Antifascismo e preferenze, Il Riformista, 18 September 2008.

<sup>10</sup> M. Comelli/J. Darnis; Europa e legittimità democratica: due proposte, Affari Internazionali, 8 August 2008, available at: <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=915> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>11</sup> R. Gualtieri: La preferenza per evitare le oligarchie, Il Mattino, 18 September 2008.

On the other hand, some commentators were in favour of abolishing preferences. For example, Antonio Missiroli, director of studies of the “European Policy Centre”, affirmed that “the preference vote has an influence on both the electoral campaign – driving the parties to put more popular candidates on the lists [...] in order to attract a higher number of votes – and the consequent behaviour of the elected candidates, who have to keep visibility in their country in order to gain a second mandate”<sup>12</sup>.

Some journalists also argued that the preference system has the negative effect of forcing the potential candidates to fight against one another in order to gain votes through the use of advertisements, and political dinners and cocktails. Thus, the consequence is that only the wealthiest candidates are elected.<sup>13</sup>

The text proposed by the PdL was discussed in the Italian parliament on the 27 October 2008. On that occasion, the President of Italian Republic, Giorgio Napolitano, asked for “a large consensus in parliament”, which in his opinion, is a fundamental condition when “it comes to modifying some of the most important rules of the democratic competition”<sup>14</sup>. Since there was not enough consensus among the different parties, Silvio Berlusconi declared that for the time being it was better to maintain the current electoral law.<sup>15</sup> At present, Elio Vito, Minister for Relations with Parliament, and Dario Franceschini, deputy-secretary of PD, are working on a compromise on the reform.<sup>16</sup>

Above and beyond the national electoral law, some observers raised proposals about the European electoral system. Michele Comelli and Jean-Pierre Darnis, of the “International Affairs Institute”, wrote about the necessity to establish common electoral procedures all over Europe, in order to “make the European Parliament elections more ‘European’, whilst they have become just another national event, in which Europe tends to be only an accessory element”<sup>17</sup>.

In concerns to Italian citizens, the results of the last Eurobarometer survey showed that at present, they are more aware of the importance of the European Parliament elections than the average European (41 percent of Italians are ‘somewhat interested’ in the elections as compared to the 38 percent average for other European citizens).<sup>18</sup> The issues that seem to influence Italian voters the most are economic ones such as: economic growth (47 percent), unemployment (42 percent), inflation and purchasing power (40 percent).<sup>19</sup>

<sup>12</sup> A. Missiroli: Anche in Europa si può ridare lo scettro al principe, *Affari Internazionali*, 20 August 2008, available at: <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=922> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>13</sup> L. Caputo: Ma solo così si riducono spese e clientele, *Il Giornale*, 15 September 2008, available at: <http://www.ilgiornale.it/a.pic1?ID=290549&START=1&2col=&page=2> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>14</sup> See: Verso le Europee, appello di Napolitano: ampio consenso sulla legge, *Panorama*, 28 October 2008, available at: <http://blog.panorama.it/italia/2008/10/28/verso-le-europee-lappello-di-napolitano-ampio-consenso-sulla-legge/> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>15</sup> P. De Martino: PD e PDL ci riprovano, legge modello svedese-belga, 9 January 2008, available at: [http://www.asca.it/news-EUROPEE\\_PD\\_E\\_PDL\\_CI\\_RIPROVANO\\_LEGGE\\_MODELLO\\_SVEDESE-BELGA\\_\(IL\\_PUNTO\)-801021-ORA-.html](http://www.asca.it/news-EUROPEE_PD_E_PDL_CI_RIPROVANO_LEGGE_MODELLO_SVEDESE-BELGA_(IL_PUNTO)-801021-ORA-.html) (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> M. Comelli/J. Darnis: Europa e legittimità democratica: due proposte, *Affari Internazionali*, 8 August 2008, available at: <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=915> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>18</sup> Special Eurobarometer 299: The 2009 European Elections. Results for Italy, September 2008, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_299\\_it\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_299_it_en.pdf) (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

*The formation of the new Commission in autumn 2009*

In Italy, the debate on the formation of the new European Commission has been focused particularly on the appointment of its president. For Italian observers, it is not only a matter of who will be the next person to hold this position, but also of how this choice will be made.

As for possible nominees, Italian Prime Minister Berlusconi announced that he is in favour of a second mandate for the current President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso. He affirmed that “it would be absurd to throw away his intelligence and experience”<sup>20</sup>.

More generally, forming a new European Commission is considered an opportunity to restore the linkage between European citizens and the EU institutions. For this reason, some Italian analysts and politicians are in favour of a sort of direct election of the President of the European Commission. This idea, which was already proposed in 1999 by Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa of “Notre Europe”,<sup>21</sup> has been central in the debate concerning the next European Commission. According to Gianni Bonvicini, vice-president of the “International Affairs Institute”, there is widespread consent on the necessity to make the European elections more ‘politicised’.<sup>22</sup> He suggests that, before the elections, each European party should choose a candidate to run for the position of the President of the European Commission. The party that gains the majority in the European Parliament could then indicate the person they supported to the European Council.<sup>23</sup> This approach has already been used by the European People’s Party, which proposed Barroso again as its candidate for this role. In Bonvicini’s opinion, this mechanism would make it possible for European parties to have their electoral programmes carried out by a person with strong legitimacy deriving from the European citizens. This idea is shared by Antonio Missiroli, director of studies of the “European Policy Centre”, who wrote an article in which he analyzes the advantages and disadvantages of such a proposal.<sup>24</sup> Among the shortcomings of the direct election of the next President of the European Commission, is the fact that this solution would probably politicise the Commission too much, which would be strongly influenced by the winning party. This could have negative consequences on the ‘regulatory’ role of the Commission, which is often in charge of ‘technical’ decisions that should be not affected by party politics.<sup>25</sup> Notwithstanding this possible drawback, Missiroli believes that the direct election of the European Commission’s President would have more positive than negative effects. By voting for the candidate to this office, European citizens would be given the opportunity to express themselves in a

<sup>20</sup>See: Il Cavaliere “ricandida” il portoghese, Corriere della Sera, 16 July 2008, available at: [http://rassegna.camera.it/chiosco\\_new/pagweb/immagineFrame.asp?comeFrom=search&currentArticle=I\\_PMPB](http://rassegna.camera.it/chiosco_new/pagweb/immagineFrame.asp?comeFrom=search&currentArticle=I_PMPB) (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>21</sup> T. Padoa Schioppa: From the single currency to the single ballot-box, Paris 1999, available at: <http://www.notre-europe.eu/en/> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>22</sup> G. Bonvicini: Elezione “diretta” del Presidente della Commissione europea?, Affari Internazionali, 8 August 2008, available at: <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=914> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> A. Missiroli: Anche in Europa si può ridare lo scettro al principe, Affari Internazionali, 20 August 2008, available at: <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=922> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

‘pan-European electoral campaign’, conducted at the European rather than at the national level.<sup>26</sup>

Other observers also think that it would be very important for the European electorate to choose directly the European Commission’s President, whom is considered “the key figure of the EU”<sup>27</sup>. This solution is in fact considered to be both “useful” and “feasible”:<sup>28</sup> useful, because it would help to reduce the gap between the citizens and the European institutions and at the same time would stimulate an open debate on the possible candidates, improving the transparency within the EU; feasible, because it would not require a change of the treaties since it would be possible under the present rules.<sup>29</sup>

The idea of the direct election of the President of the European Commission is strongly sustained by the “European Federalist Movement”. In fact, they conducted an online campaign called “Who is your candidate?”, which aimed at collecting signatures and asking the members of the political parties to choose their candidate before the elections, since they believe that this would improve the accountability and transparency of European institutions.<sup>30</sup> They collected 1.285 signatures of people from all EU member states, including a few Italians.

From this overview, it may be noted that if there has been a debate in Italy concerning the new European Commission, it has been focused mostly on the possibility of direct election of its President. According to some authors, this mechanism would stimulate people’s participation in the 2009 elections, which is very low at present. In fact, as the last Eurobarometer shows, Italian public opinion’s trust in the European Commission is quite high (48 percent)<sup>31</sup> and a change like the one proposed by some Italian analysts would probably increase it.

### *The appointment of the High Representative*

In Italy, after the Irish ‘No’ to the Lisbon Treaty, the debate on a possible new High Representative was quite scarce. This is due to the fact that in such a difficult moment for Europe, it is common thought that it would be very useful to keep the expertise of the person who already held this position.

Therefore, for many reasons, there is a widespread perception that Javier Solana should be appointed as “Mr. CFSP”<sup>32</sup> again.. First, he is now an “expert” and “able to mediate”, and secondly, he is a socialist; this last element would make him the perfect candidate to counterbalance the likely reappointment of Barroso as President of the European Commission.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> M. Ruta: Come scegliere il Prossimo Presidente della Commissione UE?, 7 September 2008, available at: [http://www.imille.org/2008/09/come\\_scegliere\\_il\\_prossimo\\_pre.html](http://www.imille.org/2008/09/come_scegliere_il_prossimo_pre.html) (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> See: <http://who-is-your-candidate.eu/index.php?lang=it> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>31</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 69, Spring 2008, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb69/eb69\\_it\\_exe.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb69/eb69_it_exe.pdf) (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>32</sup> See: Unione europea: il valzer delle poltrone scatena le diplomazie europee, Panorama, 8 May 2008, available at: <http://blog.panorama.it/mondo/2008/05/08/ue-chi-dopo-barroso-il-valzer-di-poltrone-scatena-le-diplomazie-europee/> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>33</sup> C. Tosi: Cambiare tutto per non cambiare niente, Limes, 4 January 2008, available at: <http://limes.espresso.repubblica.it/2008/01/04/cambiare-tutto-per-noncambiare-niente/?p=425> (last access: 25 January 2009).

## II.2. *Transatlantic relations renewed after President Bush: top priorities* **Beginning of a new era in international relations**

At present, both the Italian public opinion and the political elite seem to be thinking that the election of Barack Obama as President of the United States will lead to a change in the EU-US relationship. In any case, many commentators share the opinion that, in order to have a real turning point in transatlantic relations it will be necessary for both the US and the EU to address some priorities which, once dealt with, will open the way to a revitalised partnership. This will not be an easy task, since, as an Italian journalist noted, “the new US President will deal with a Europe which is different from that of eight years ago, when George W. Bush was elected: it is a Europe that is closer to the US as a political and institutional subject, but that has moved farther away at the level of public opinion”<sup>34</sup>.

First of all, the first important issue in such a process will be the ability of the European Union to act as an effective global player. As Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini stated, “the new US President Barack Obama’s multilateral approach will lead Europe to take its own responsibilities in fields such as the fight against terrorism and in global defence policy”<sup>35</sup>. In the opinion of some journalists, this demand from the new US Presidency may lead to a cleavage among EU member states: some of them will support a more active Europe in the crisis management field, while others will not.<sup>36</sup> Generally, the Italian position on this matter is that there is the possibility of a change in EU-US relations, but to make it happen, Europe has to be more cohesive and to speak with one voice. In particular, the European Union will be asked to devolve more resources to the mission in Afghanistan and to be prepared to intervene in situations that may be dangerous for international stability. In this sense, an important step was already taken in January with the EU diplomatic mission in the Middle East, which has been praised by the new American President.<sup>37</sup> However, the Europeans will have to do more than show their will to be considered an effective strategic partner by the new United States’ administration. As an Italian analyst noted: “Europe’s room for manoeuvre on the world stage is more likely to expand through strong partnership with the United States than by drifting apart from Washington”<sup>38</sup>.

The second issue, that in the opinion of the Italians will determine the future of the EU-US relationship, is the building of a new global governance, which the financial crisis of the last months has made even more essential. As an Italian journalist wrote in

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<sup>34</sup> M. Monti: L’Europa adulta e l’America, *Corriere della Sera*, 2 November 2008, available at: [http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2008/novembre/02/EUROPA\\_ADULTA\\_AMERICA\\_co\\_9\\_081102005.shtml](http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2008/novembre/02/EUROPA_ADULTA_AMERICA_co_9_081102005.shtml) (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>35</sup> See: USA-UE: Frattini, Obama chiederà più soldati, serve politica difesa comune, *Liberio*, 10 January 2009, available at: <http://www.libero-news.it/adnkronos/view/32276> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>36</sup> L. Caracciolo: E l’Europa si spaccherà, *L’Espresso*, 13 November 2008, available at: <http://espresso.repubblica.it/dettaglio/E-l-Europa-si-spaccherà/2048229/18> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>37</sup> See: Gaza/Da Obama apprezzamento a premier ceco per missione Ue, 8 January 2009, available at: [http://www.notizia.it/notizie/esteri/2009/01\\_gennaio/08/gaza\\_da\\_obama\\_apprezzamento\\_a\\_premier\\_ceco\\_per\\_missione\\_ue.17482931.html](http://www.notizia.it/notizie/esteri/2009/01_gennaio/08/gaza_da_obama_apprezzamento_a_premier_ceco_per_missione_ue.17482931.html) (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>38</sup> R. Alcaro: Where to (Re)start? Proposals for Re-launching the Transatlantic Partnership in View of the US Presidential Elections, in: R. Alcaro (ed.): *Re-Launching the Transatlantic Security Partnership*, Quaderni IAI English series, 12/2008, pp. 101-116, p.114.

an article in “Corriere della Sera”, “strong transatlantic cooperation is more necessary than ever, since the financial crisis has opened our eyes to the urgency of providing the globalised markets with solid public governance”<sup>39</sup>. In order to build a new global governance of economic processes, both the United States and the European Union are considered fundamental. On the one hand, only the US can stimulate a new policy, based on multilateralism and cooperation with partners. On the other hand, Europe has two important contributions to offer in this process: first, “the knowhow which enabled the EU institutions to successfully govern the ‘globalisation’ at the continental scale for fifty years”<sup>40</sup>; secondly, “a credibility that in the eyes of the other actors involved, such as China, is probably higher right now than that of the United States”<sup>41</sup>.

Reform of the international institutions goes in the same direction. Of them, Italian Foreign Minister, Franco Frattini, considers of the highest importance the reorganisation of the G8 structure, which will be considered under the new Italian Presidency in 2009.<sup>42</sup> The reform of other international institutions, such as the United Nations and the WTO, is also seen as one of the main points in the new EU-US agenda.<sup>43</sup> Briefly, from the Italian point of view, it is important for the United States and the European Union to work together in order to “re-establish the rules of economic governance”<sup>44</sup>.

The relationship with Russia is the other important theme that will influence the future relationship between the EU and the US. A recent survey showed that both Americans and Europeans consider Russia a risky element in international relations, not only because of the energy issue, but also because of its behaviour towards neighbourhood countries.<sup>45</sup> In an article published in “Affari Internazionali”, the Italian diplomat, Maurizio Massari, wrote that for Europe, it is of the highest importance to have a renewed relation between Moscow and Washington since “Russia has become one of the main factors of division inside the European Union and of misunderstanding in the transatlantic framework”<sup>46</sup>. From his point of view, the European Union could play an important role in softening tensions between Russia and the Western countries by promoting the ‘cooperative’ management of the ‘former Soviet neighbourhood’, which is one of the most important sources of disagreement today.<sup>47</sup> This issue is particularly important in Italy since Prime Minister Berlusconi has always been a promoter of good relations with Russia. Given this ‘special relationship’, in the opinion

<sup>39</sup> M. Monti: L’Europa adulta e l’America, Corriere della Sera, 2 November 2008, available at: [http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2008/novembre/02/EUROPA\\_ADULTA\\_AMERICA\\_co\\_9\\_081102005.shtml](http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2008/novembre/02/EUROPA_ADULTA_AMERICA_co_9_081102005.shtml) (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> M. Rigacci: McCain o Obama? UE, chiave è multilateralismo, 3 November 2008, available at: [http://www.ansa.it/opencms/export/site/notizie/rubriche/approfondimenti/visualizza\\_new.html\\_81421114\\_8.html](http://www.ansa.it/opencms/export/site/notizie/rubriche/approfondimenti/visualizza_new.html_81421114_8.html) (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> USA-UE: Frattini, Obama chiederà più soldati, serve politica difesa comune, Libero, 10 January 2009, available at: <http://www.libero-news.it/adnkronos/view/32276> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>45</sup> Filippo Vecchio: Europei Ottimisti Sulle Relazioni Transatlantiche Se Vince Obama, Meno Con McCain Presidente, Transatlantic trends, September 2008, available at: [http://www.affarinternazionali.it/Documenti/Comunicato-stampa TT08\\_ita.pdf](http://www.affarinternazionali.it/Documenti/Comunicato-stampa TT08_ita.pdf) (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>46</sup> M. Massari: Obama di fronte alla sfida russa, Affari internazionali, 5 November 2008, available at: <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=980> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.



of some commentators, Italy could play an important role in facilitating Russia-US communication. Gianni De Michelis, MEP for the Partito Socialista and former Italian Foreign Minister, affirmed that, for the new US President, “Italy will be very useful for the dialogue with Putin”<sup>48</sup>. This opinion is shared by the Italian Prime Minister, who, in an interview given a few days after Obama’s election, said: “I suggest that Obama should not go on with the escalation of negative relations with Russia”<sup>49</sup>.

To conclude, it may be noted that both the Italian public opinion and politicians consider the election of Obama as President of the United States as the first step of an important change in international relations. This idea is generally shared by the whole political elite. Walter Veltroni, leader of the opposition party PD, affirmed that “this is the beginning of a new era that will change history”<sup>50</sup>. The Italian Foreign Minister declared that there will be a re-launch of the partnership between the US and Europe and that Italy will play an important role in it.<sup>51</sup> Piero Fassino, the Italian shadow minister for foreign affairs, affirmed that with Obama’s election “there will be a definite change in relations between the United States and the European Union”<sup>52</sup>. However, to make it happen, it is common opinion that Europe will have to show that it is ready to act beside the new US-presidency and that it is strong enough to take on its own responsibilities. Therefore, whether Obama will bring a change in the US-EU relationship or not does not only depend on him alone, but depends mostly on the way the Europeans will be ready to interact with the new American administration.

### II.3 *Financial crisis*

#### **A year of uncertainties brings the need to connect with the new dynamic areas of the world**

In the last months, many opinions have been expressed in Italy on the way the European Union intervened in reaction to the financial crisis. In this context, the expectations towards the EU are quite high, since it is common opinion that nowadays “the globalised market is too complex to be managed at a domestic and national level”<sup>53</sup> and therefore there is great confidence in the role that Europe can play in the hard times we are going through. In this regard, it has been noted that, after the initiatives undertaken by the European institutions to face the financial crisis, “the public opinion may have a different perception, a more positive one, of the role that the Union can play”<sup>54</sup>.

<sup>48</sup> Interview to Gianni De Michelis, *Il Riformista*, 5 November 2008, available at: [http://www.magna-carta.it/files/Rassegna\\_stampa\\_Elezioni\\_Usa\\_5\\_novembre.pdf](http://www.magna-carta.it/files/Rassegna_stampa_Elezioni_Usa_5_novembre.pdf) (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>49</sup> See: Berlusconi a Obama: priorità legame con Russia, *Il Giornale*, 11 November 2008, available at: <http://www.ilgiornale.it/a.pic1?ID=305349> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>50</sup> See: <http://www.adnkronos.com/IGN/Politica/?id=3.0.2930261222> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>51</sup> See: Applaudono tutti. Napolitano: giorno di grande speranza, *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*, 6 November 2008.

<sup>52</sup> See: Usa 2008: Fassino, con Obama miglioreranno rapporti con Ue, 5 November 2008, available at: <http://www.repubblica.it/ultimora/politica/USA-2008FASSINO-CON-OBAMA-MIGLIORERANNO-RAPPORTI-CON-UE/news-dettaglio/3393896> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>53</sup> M. De Andreis/M. Marè: La crisi finanziaria e l’Unione Europea: quali insegnamenti per la governance europea?, 28 October 2008, available at: [http://www.astrid-online.it/rassegna/28-10-2008/MARE-DE-ANDREIS\\_governance-ue\\_23\\_10\\_08.pdf](http://www.astrid-online.it/rassegna/28-10-2008/MARE-DE-ANDREIS_governance-ue_23_10_08.pdf) (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>54</sup> M. T. Salvemini: Tre opzioni per una risposta europea alla crisi finanziaria, *Affari Internazionali*, 8 November 2008, available at: <http://www.affariinternazionali.it/> (last access: 25 January 2009).

The confidence in the European Union is due to the fact that the EU has some advantages that can be usefully exploited in this situation. Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa, former Italian Minister for the Economy, said that Europe is strong for different reasons: its balance of payments is in equilibrium and there is monetary stability; the idea that the market is always efficient is less deep-rooted than in the United States; the welfare state in Europe is more developed than in other parts of the world and it makes it easier to face this kind of crisis.<sup>55</sup> The Italian shadow foreign minister Piero Fassino said that there is a contradiction in the economy nowadays: while the production systems and consumer demand are globalised, these processes are still managed by many small national governments and by weak international organisations. In his opinion, the only possible answer to this discrepancy is to increase the power of regional organisations, of which the European Union is surely the most developed.<sup>56</sup>

Coordination of the interventions promoted in Europe after the Ecofin meeting in October 2008 has been judged positively by both Italian experts and politicians. However, in the opinion of some of them, there is still a lot of work to be done, because the European answer to the financial crisis has several inherent ‘costs’: the suspension of some fundamental principles of the common market, such as the prohibition of state aid; the softening of some fiscal and budgetary rules; the temporary renunciation of a higher level of financial integration in Europe; the marginalisation of the European Commission in favour of the intergovernmental approach.<sup>57</sup> In particular, some journalists highlighted that, during the financial crisis, the intergovernmental approach has come out again as a result of the will of different EU member states to pursue their own domestic interests and to safeguard national actors as much as possible.<sup>58</sup> This is why these analysts fear that the crisis “will act as a detonator [...] and put the *acquis communautaire* under discussion again”<sup>59</sup>, affirming that Europe will have to beware of not losing the progress achieved in the field of economic integration and productivity.<sup>60</sup> However, not all Italian commentators consider the use of the intergovernmental approach negative. Some of them believe that in this situation the European Union has successfully used the ‘vanguard approach’, already applied in other circumstances in the past: the need for a quick answer to the international economic crisis has led the major

<sup>55</sup> Interview to Tommaso Padoa Schioppa, in: *Il Regno* 18/2008, available at: [http://www.ilregno.it/it/rivista\\_articolo.php?RID=0&CODICE=49211](http://www.ilregno.it/it/rivista_articolo.php?RID=0&CODICE=49211) (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>56</sup> See: *L’Unione Europea e questa lunga crisi*, Extrait du Euros du Village, available at: [http://www.glieuros.eu/IMG/article\\_PDF/L-Unione-Europea-e-questa-lunga,2052.pdf](http://www.glieuros.eu/IMG/article_PDF/L-Unione-Europea-e-questa-lunga,2052.pdf) (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>57</sup> M. De Andreis/M. Marè: *La crisi finanziaria e l’Unione Europea: quali insegnamenti per la governance europea?*, 28 October 2008, available at: [http://www.astrid-online.it/rassegna/28-10-2008/MARE- DE- ANDREIS\\_governance-ue\\_23\\_10\\_08.pdf](http://www.astrid-online.it/rassegna/28-10-2008/MARE- DE- ANDREIS_governance-ue_23_10_08.pdf) (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>58</sup> M. Marchi: *L’Europa di fronte alla crisi finanziaria prova a salvare la faccia*, *L’Occidentale*, 3 October 2008, available at: <http://www.loccidentale.it/> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>59</sup> M. De Andreis/M. Marè: *La crisi finanziaria e l’Unione Europea: quali insegnamenti per la governance europea?*, 28 October 2008, available at: [http://www.astrid-online.it/rassegna/28-10-2008/MARE- DE- ANDREIS\\_governance-ue\\_23\\_10\\_08.pdf](http://www.astrid-online.it/rassegna/28-10-2008/MARE- DE- ANDREIS_governance-ue_23_10_08.pdf) (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>60</sup> C. Altomonte/M. Nava: *Bruxelles salva Wall Street? La governance dell’economia europea e la crisi finanziaria*, ISPI Policy Brief No. 99, October 2008, available at: [http://www.ispionline.it/it/documents/PB\\_99\\_2008.pdf](http://www.ispionline.it/it/documents/PB_99_2008.pdf) (last access: 25 January 2009).

EU member states to work together to prepare a plan to face the challenge.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, for once Europe has been a model for the United States and not vice versa.<sup>62</sup>

Some Italian analysts also believe that the present situation could be an opportunity for Europe to show its great potential. Maria Teresa Salvemini suggested three possible 'European' solutions to the current crisis. First of all, it would be useful to make the limits imposed by the Stability and Growth Pact less strict, allowing temporary budget deficits in situations of economic crisis. Secondly, she proposed establishing a 'European plan' that would make use of European financial resources, gained by issuing EU bonds ('Eurobonds'). Finally, she proposed an agreement within the Eurogroup aimed at harmonizing the budgetary policies by using the same instruments and rules. According to Salvemini, these proposals would be even more efficient if they were all undertaken together.<sup>63</sup> As she wrote in her article, "the time for Europe in this field has come: now it has to make the best possible use of it"<sup>64</sup>.

To conclude, the Italian public opinion has perceived the performance of the EU in the financial crisis positively, even if some questions still remain unsolved and some aspects of the European approach may need to be revised. Anyway, as the Italian journalist and historian Sergio Romano noted, even if the European answer to the crisis was not as coordinated as expected, at least Sarkozy's initiatives and the anti-crisis plan have made Europe "more visible and more efficient". Therefore, in a certain sense, it may be affirmed that the crisis has not had only negative effects on the European Union.<sup>65</sup>

#### *Expected shifts in the international power constellation*

The year 2009 is expected to be a year of change in the international environment as the result of many factors that will surely influence the present power constellation.

The first factor that will inevitably affect the future balance of power is the election of Barack Obama as President of the United States. The new US administration's multilateral approach to foreign policy implies that it will look for reliable partners to intervene wherever it is necessary in the world. For this reason, many Italian commentators consider 2009 the year in which the European Union will have the possibility to play a key role on the international scene. For the United States, the Europeans are "the only allies who can seriously contribute to the stabilisation of crisis areas where American soldiers are engaged"<sup>66</sup>. Of course this is the case of Afghanistan and the tribal provinces of Pakistan, but there are also other areas of the world in which the EU can use its diplomatic, economic and even military power to act as a stabilising factor.

The first area of intervention should of course be the Middle East. The European Union is expected to play an important mediating role in the Gaza conflict; here the EU

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<sup>61</sup> See: La crisi finanziaria e i nuovi equilibri mondiali, in: ISPI – Relazioni internazionali 30/2008, available at: <http://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazioni.php> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> M. T. Salvemini: Tre opzioni per una risposta europea alla crisi finanziaria, Affari Internazionali, 8tNovembre 2008, available at: <http://www.affariinternazionali.it/> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> S. Romano: L'Europa nella crisi. Un passo verso l'unione, Corriere della Sera, 3 November 2008.

<sup>66</sup> L. Caracciolo: Il nuovo ruolo dell'Europa, Limes online 22 January 2009, available at: <http://temi.repubblica.it/limes/il-nuovo-ruolo-delleuropa/> (last access: 25 January 2009).

member states could have “a higher level of engagement”, proportionate to the financial support that in the last years they have spent on stabilising the region, which is of the highest interest for them.<sup>67</sup>

Secondly, the EU will be a fundamental partner for the United States in the definition of a new relationship with Russia. It is common opinion that Russia is one of the pivotal elements of the future international power constellation. Especially after the crisis in Georgia, there are many reasons to re-establish communications with President Medvedev and his entourage. First of all, in the last months Russia has been a factor of division both inside the European Union and in the transatlantic framework.<sup>68</sup> Secondly, it will be impossible for the European Union to re-stabilise the Caucasus region and to implement its Neighbourhood Policy without a cooperative approach towards Russia.<sup>69</sup> Thirdly, it is desirable to have better relations with a country that is one of the most important energy providers for the West. For all these reasons, it would be important for the EU to start an open dialogue with Russia in order to soften the tensions between this power and western countries.<sup>70</sup>

The other uncertain issue is the role that the so-called ‘rising powers’ will play. In particular, especially after the problems brought on by the financial crisis, it will be fundamental both for the US and the EU to promote an open and stable relationship with China. In the last months, there has been great concern in Italy for the future of EU-China relations. The deferment of the EU-China Summit planned for the beginning of December 2008 has been considered by Italian commentators as just “the tip of the iceberg of the deterioration of Sino-European relations that has occurred in the last years”<sup>71</sup>. Considering that China is one of the most powerful emerging economies and that its market is strongly linked to that of Europe – the EU is China’s first trade partner and China is the EU’s second trade partner after the United States – Italian analysts affirm that it is necessary for both China and the EU to cooperate to establish a good relationship again.<sup>72</sup> In their opinion, “it is fundamental for both Italy and Europe to get connected with the most dynamic areas of the world”, among which, China.<sup>73</sup> At present, the visit of Chinese Prime Minister, Wen Jiabao, to Europe seems to be the first step towards a renewed partnership. This is even more important when considering that this trip, planned several months ago, will take place before any official Chinese visit to the new American President Obama.<sup>74</sup> In this sense, the European Union could be the first to build the foundation for stronger links between China and western countries, the United States included.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> M. Massari: Obama di fronte alla sfida russa, *Affari internazionali*, 5 November 2008, available at: <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=980> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>69</sup> E. Greco: Il rapporto tra la Russia e l’Unione Europea: come rilanciare la cooperazione in vista del rinnovo dell’accordo di partenariato, Discorso tenuto in occasione della IX riunione della grande commissione Italia-Russia, in: camera dei Deputati, Documenti IAI 0830, Roma, 24/25 November 2008, available at: <http://www.iai.it/pdf/DocIAI/iai0830.pdf> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>70</sup> M. Massari: Obama di fronte alla sfida russa, *Affari internazionali*, 5 November 2008, available at: <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=980> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>71</sup> N. Canarini: Un New Deal tra Europa e Cina, *Affari Internazionali*, 10 December 2008, available at: <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=1022> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> S. Fagiolo: La paura della Cina, in: *Aspenia*, 41/2008, p. 233.

<sup>74</sup> See: Usa-Ue-Cina, triangolo ad alta tensione, *la Repubblica*, 26 January 2009, available at: <http://www.repubblica.it/2008/06/rubriche/piazza-asiatica/cina-usa-ostili/cina-usa-ostili.html?rss> (last access: 25 January 2009).

The year 2009 will surely be characterised by uncertainty: many different changes are expected to occur and it is not easy to forecast how they will interact with each other. However, for the same reason, 2009 will also be a year of opportunities: the present financial crisis will probably provide the stimulus for a general reform of the global governance and of international institutions; the conflicts that occurred in the last months (Tibet, Georgia, Gaza) are likely to bring about deeper engagement of the main international actors and deeper cooperation among them; the multilateral approach of the new US President will probably be the platform for a more equal and balanced transatlantic partnership. Many analysts believe that the time has come for Europe to seize these opportunities. However, to make it happen, the EU will have to be more cohesive and ready to intervene in those areas where it can make a difference; it will have to show the other global powers, especially the new US administration, that it has the will to get involved in defining a new international balance.

## **II. Looking back to the French Presidency** **Sarkozy's combination of activism and pragmatism, concerns about Czech Presidency**

Concerning the French Presidency, both Italian politicians and public opinion seem to agree that it was helpful to have such strong leadership in the past six months in which the EU, like other international actors, faced many challenges. As representatives of the press noted, the French Presidency semester took place in a very difficult moment for both Europe and the world: it started just after the Irish “No” to the Treaty of Lisbon, it had to deal with the crisis in Georgia and, finally, it went through the global financial crisis.

Given all these difficulties, Italians generally have a positive judgement of Sarkozy and the way he acted as the ‘EU-President’. As Franco Venturini affirmed in an article published by the Italian newspaper “Corriere della Sera”, “in a *crescendo* of initiatives, Sarkozy is shaping a Europe that others had in mind, but that nobody dared bring to light”<sup>75</sup>. Even if the press often speaks of Sarkozy as a “hyperactive” politician, “not inclined to consult with others”<sup>76</sup>, who behaves with great “ambition and presidentialism”<sup>77</sup>, everybody seems to agree that this kind of behaviour is justified in light of the results of his policies.<sup>78</sup>

The French Presidency has been judged firstly in respect of the aims it established when it started its mandate in July and, secondly, with reference to its reaction to the contingent difficulties that affected Europe in the last months. Concerning the points of the presidency’s agenda, a central issue is the future of the Common Agricultural Policy after 2013. At the European Agricultural Ministers

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<sup>75</sup> F. Venturini: L’Europa e il freno della Merkel, Corriere della Sera, 8 November 2008, available at: [http://rassegna.camera.it/chiosco\\_new/pagweb/immagineFrame.asp?comeFrom=rassegna&currentArticle=JT3DX](http://rassegna.camera.it/chiosco_new/pagweb/immagineFrame.asp?comeFrom=rassegna&currentArticle=JT3DX) (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> M. Zatterin: Praga furiosa con Sarkò ‘La guida dell’UE è nostra anche con la recessione’, 16 November 2008, available at: <http://78.4.240.5/files/rassegnastampa/081116/000000060.pdf> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

Summit of 28 November 2008, the Italian Minister for Agricultural Policies, Luca Zaia, supported the French position in favour of upholding subsidies for farmers.<sup>79</sup>

Moreover, many Italian politicians have also turned out to be in favour of the initiatives undertaken by Sarkozy in the field of immigration, which is one of the hottest issues in our domestic politics. After the adoption of the European Pact on Immigration and Asylum, one of the French Presidency's objectives, the Italian undersecretary of the interior, Nitto Francesco Palma, declared: "At last the EU is taking on responsibility for the problems of those frontier countries, like Italy, which are over-exposed to the phenomenon of illegal immigration"<sup>80</sup>.

Another important issue on Sarkozy's European agenda was the launch of the Union for the Mediterranean, which Italian commentators feel has made great progress, especially after the Foreign Ministers Summit in Marseille on 3 and 4 November 2008,<sup>81</sup> thanks to Sarkozy's activity.

However, far more opinions have been expressed in relation to the French Presidency's reactions to the unexpected events in which the European Union was involved in the past months and Sarkozy's activism on those occasions. Many considered the 'EU-President's' strong intervention in the negotiations during the crisis in Georgia in August 2008 positively. On that occasion, he was praised for "avoiding a dangerous mediation vacuum"<sup>82</sup>, thanks to his "timely intervention"<sup>83</sup> in favour of the restoration of peace in the Caucasus.

Moreover, the 'President of the EU' has been praised for his conduct in the financial crisis of the last months, notwithstanding the obstacles put in his way by German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Many articles of the Italian press have observed that Berlin has opposed French Presidency proposals on several occasions, mostly in relation to the financial crisis. Some journalists think that this is due to Berlin's fear of losing its leading role in Europe.<sup>84</sup> Notwithstanding the difficulties caused by the not always easy relationship between Germany and France and their diverging opinions on the best way to go through the economic crisis, in the opinion of many Italian commentators, the initiatives undertaken by Sarkozy have managed to make the European Union "more visible" and "more effective" in the international environment.<sup>85</sup> The Italian press has considered the fact that the presidency was in the hands of such a

<sup>79</sup> A. Longhini: Francia: un bilancio del semestre europeo, 5 December 2008 Available at: [http://www.equilibri.net/articolo/10868/Francia\\_un\\_bilancio\\_del\\_semestre\\_europeo](http://www.equilibri.net/articolo/10868/Francia_un_bilancio_del_semestre_europeo) (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>80</sup> See: Patto europeo sull'emergenza immigrazione, Il Giornale, 26 September 2008, available at: <http://www.ilgiornale.it/a.pic1?ID=293482> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>81</sup> A. Longhini: Francia: un bilancio del semestre europeo, 5 December 2008 Available at: [http://www.equilibri.net/articolo/10868/Francia\\_un\\_bilancio\\_del\\_semestre\\_europeo](http://www.equilibri.net/articolo/10868/Francia_un_bilancio_del_semestre_europeo) (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>82</sup> F. Venturini: L'Europa e il freno della Merkel, Corriere della Sera, 8 November 2008, available at: [http://rassegna.camera.it/chiosco\\_new/pagweb/immagineFrame.asp?comeFrom=rassegna&currentArticle=JT3DX](http://rassegna.camera.it/chiosco_new/pagweb/immagineFrame.asp?comeFrom=rassegna&currentArticle=JT3DX) (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>83</sup> F. Chittolina: Il difficile semestre della presidenza francese dell'UE, 17 October 2008, available at: <http://www.apiceuropa.com/wp2> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>84</sup> F. Venturini: L'Europa e il freno della Merkel, Corriere della Sera, 8 November 2008, available at: [http://rassegna.camera.it/chiosco\\_new/pagweb/immagineFrame.asp?comeFrom=rassegna&currentArticle=JT3DX](http://rassegna.camera.it/chiosco_new/pagweb/immagineFrame.asp?comeFrom=rassegna&currentArticle=JT3DX) (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>85</sup> S. Romano: L'Europa nella crisi – Un passo verso l'Unione, Corriere della Sera, 30 November 2008, available at: [http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2008/novembre/30/EUROPA\\_NELLA\\_CRISI\\_PASSO\\_VERSO\\_co\\_9\\_0\\_81130029.shtml](http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2008/novembre/30/EUROPA_NELLA_CRISI_PASSO_VERSO_co_9_0_81130029.shtml) (last access: 25 January 2009).

strong leader in these difficult times a ‘lucky coincidence’ for the European Union, which would have been in far more difficulty under the past presidency (Slovenia) or the next one, since the Czech Republic is not even part of the Euroarea.<sup>86</sup>

Finally, the December 2008 European Council was perceived in Italy as the last great success of the French Presidency, because it managed to find a compromise among the 27 member states on long-debated issues and particularly on the future of the Lisbon Treaty.<sup>87</sup>

To conclude, both the Italian public opinion and politicians think that the French Presidency, notwithstanding the sometimes excessive activism and presidentialism of the French leader, was very good and managed to respond successfully to the unexpected events of the last months. Sarkozy’s leadership has been widely praised. The Italian Foreign Minister, Franco Frattini, when asked his opinion about the French semester, answered: “My opinion is positive, because I believe that the French Presidency managed to combine the activism required in difficult moments with pragmatism”<sup>88</sup>.

As to the Czech Presidency, many doubts have been expressed on the possibilities of it being as effective and strong as the French. First of all, as noted before, many fear that the fact that the Czech Republic is outside the Euroarea will somehow undermine European action in these difficult economic times and that it will keep the EU outside of many important international forums. Moreover, there is much concern for the eurosceptical position of the Czech Head of State, Václav Klaus, who recently defined himself a “dissident of the EU”<sup>89</sup> and refused to hoist the European flag outside the Prague castle. Klaus was defined as “a dead-end street” for the European Union, since he considers the European semester “a waste of time”<sup>90</sup>.

Many articles in the Italian press noted that the future European Council President, Czech Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek, will also have to deal with the domestic problem of the still pending ratification of the Lisbon Treaty.<sup>91</sup> This will put him in a difficult position: on one hand, he will gradually have to make the other EU member states trust him and his leadership, while, on the other hand, he will have to combat those sentiments in his own country contrary to the ratification of the new European treaty.<sup>92</sup> This looks like a very hard task, since, as some journalists have highlighted, he has only a two-deputy majority in parliament and is therefore very weak.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>86</sup> M. Monti: Un successo dell’Europa, *Corriere della Sera*, 19 October 2008.

<sup>87</sup> A. Cerretelli: I sei mesi d’oro di Sarkozy, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 13 December 2008, available at: [http://rassegna.governo.it/rs\\_pdf/pdf/K6C/K6CYV.pdf](http://rassegna.governo.it/rs_pdf/pdf/K6C/K6CYV.pdf) (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>88</sup> See: Intervista a Franco Frattini, Parigi e Berlino litigano? E noi Godremo, *Libero Mercato*, 2 January 2009, available at: <http://www.openpolis.it/dichiarazione/383329> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>89</sup> M. Zatterin. Praga furiosa con Sarkò ‘La guida dell’UE è nostra anche con la recessione’, 16 November 2008, available at: <http://78.4.240.5/files/rassegnastampa/081116/000000060.pdf> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>90</sup> See: Il vicolo ceco dell’Unione si chiama Klaus, *Il Foglio*, 21 December 2008, available at: [http://rassegna.governo.it/rs\\_pdf/pdf/K9B/K9BT4.pdf](http://rassegna.governo.it/rs_pdf/pdf/K9B/K9BT4.pdf) (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>91</sup> See: <http://www.euronews.net/it/article/12/12/2008/european-union-overregulated-says-new-eu-president-mirek-topolane/> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> A. Cerretelli: Una prova difficile per Praga alla presidenza UE, *Il Sole 24 Ore*.

Notwithstanding all these perplexities, the Italian Foreign Minister, Franco Frattini, affirmed that he trusts Topolánek and is optimistic about the Czech Presidency.<sup>94</sup>

It is evident that Italian commentators share the opinion that, with the end of the French leadership of the European Council, the EU is going to lose an important ‘engine’ and that the new presidency will not be able to be as effective as the last one.<sup>95</sup> However, even if there are many doubts about Topolánek’s leadership, some, quoting a sentence pronounced by the Czech Vice-Premier Alexandr Vondra, argue that “to start without many expectations may be an advantage”, because the Czechs may surprise their European partners positively.<sup>96</sup>

### **III. Prospects for ENP and enlargement after ‘Georgia’ Structural weakness of the European Neighbourhood Policy, strong and balanced relationship with Russia needed**

In Italy, the issue of the future of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the enlargement of the EU is not of high salience as other European matters and therefore it has been debated much more at the level of think tanks and political elites than at the public opinion one.

Antonio Missiroli, director of studies at the “European Policy Centre”, believes that, after the Georgian crisis, the current ENP rationale is probably not adequate to meet the new challenges in this region.<sup>97</sup> In his opinion, this is due to the fact that the ENP still suffers from three “structural weaknesses”: “it is neither enlargement nor foreign policy proper, and cannot therefore bring to bear all the tools of either; it is seriously under-resourced and over-reflective of the EU self-interest, so that there is too little in it for the neighbours; and it continues to constitute a catalyst for the different geopolitical priorities of the 27, thus generating permanent internal tensions and, occasionally, even paralysis”<sup>98</sup>.

Moreover, according to some analysts, the conflict in the Caucasus, notwithstanding the key role played by Nicolas Sarkozy and the EU, had the effect of weakening the European Union’s links with Georgia.<sup>99</sup> According to Andrea Carteny, Italian executive director of the “Italy-Rumanian Institute of Historical Studies” of the Babeş-Bolyai University, the Georgian government now seems much more oriented towards a ‘privileged axes’ with Washington and membership in NATO than in the

<sup>94</sup> See: Intervista a Franco Frattini, Parigi e Berlino litigano? E noi Godremo, *Libero Mercato*, 2 January 2009, available at: <http://www.openpolis.it/dichiarazione/383329> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>95</sup> P. Pombeni: L’Europa smarrita, 2 November 2008, available at: <http://www.europressresearch.eu/html/mappe/editoriale.php?id=192&lang=ITA> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>96</sup> See: La “Repubblica degli euroscettici” alla guida dell’UE, *Corriere della Sera*, 2 January 2009, available at: [http://archivistorico.corriere.it/2009/gennaio/02/Repubblica\\_degli\\_euroscettici\\_alla\\_guida\\_co\\_9\\_09010\\_2009.shtml](http://archivistorico.corriere.it/2009/gennaio/02/Repubblica_degli_euroscettici_alla_guida_co_9_09010_2009.shtml) (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>97</sup> A. Missiroli: The guns of August, EPC Commentary, 4 September 2008, available at: <http://www.epc.eu/en/pub.asp?TYP=TEWN&LV=187&see=y&t=32&PG=TEWN/EN/detailpub&l=12&AI=940>. (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> A. Carteny: Verso la Nato, ma a che prezzo?, *Affari Internazionali*, 24 August 2008, available at: <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=924> (last access: 25 January 2009).



European Union.<sup>100</sup> Other Italian observers have suggested that Georgia's inclusion in NATO should be neither accelerated nor slowed down by the events of the last summer, but should still be based instead on objective criteria, which should never be put into question by contingent circumstances.<sup>101</sup>

It is a widely shared opinion that, in order to better define the future of the ENP and enlargement, a top priority for the EU should be to establish a balanced relationship with Russia. As Ettore Greco, director of the "International Affairs Institute", stated in a speech held during a meeting of the Italy-Russia committee of the Italian parliament's "Camera dei deputati", "one of the most important lessons learnt from the last summer crisis is that it is necessary to work for a joint solution of the political and security problems which affect EU and Russia's common neighbourhood"<sup>102</sup>. In fact, according to some Italian analysts, the conflict in the Caucasus revealed "how much the European neighbourhood is insecure"<sup>103</sup> and therefore showed the importance of an open policy towards Russia, instead of an antagonistic approach that would only be harmful.

As some Italian observers underlined, the conflict in Georgia also had the effect of accelerating the project of Eastern Partnership promoted by Sweden and Poland to strengthen the relationship with the EU's Eastern neighbours.<sup>104</sup> From the Italian point of view, this is a positive and ambitious project that nonetheless, needs to be balanced by the promotion of other European partnerships; for this reason, Italy still supports the Union for the Mediterranean. According to Michele Comelli of the "International Affairs Institute", "it is important for the European Neighbourhood Policy framework to keep together at a level of principles both the Eastern and Southern neighbours, even if the policies towards the two different regions are necessarily differentiated"<sup>105</sup>. Italy is very interested in the development of the ENP, but it is important to guarantee "consistency between the ENP and the other strategies that the EU is undertaking in the same region (energy, migrations, EU/Africa)"<sup>106</sup>.

When discussing the European Union's enlargement after the Georgian crisis, another important element taken into account by Italian think tanks is the link that connects the region of the Caucasus to Turkey.<sup>107</sup> The Turkish government has played an important role in the post-conflict phase in this region, by proposing a platform for

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> E. Alessandri: La partita a scacchi con mosca e i principi dell' Occidente, *Affari Internazionali* 21 August 2008, available at: <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=923> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>102</sup> E. Greco: Il rapporto tra la Russia e l'Unione Europea: come rilanciare la cooperazione in vista del rinnovo dell'accordo di partenariato, Discorso tenuto in occasione della IX riunione della grande commissione Italia-Russia, in: camera dei Deputati, Documenti IAI 0830, Roma, 24/25 November 2008, available at: <http://www.iai.it/pdf/DocIAI/iai0830.pdf> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>103</sup> M. Comelli: Il nuovo orizzonte orientale dell'Unione Europea, *Affari Internazionali*, 5 December 2008, available at: <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=1018> (last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> G. Bochicchio. Stabilità e sicurezza ai confini dell'UE: la Politica Europea di Vicinato, in: *Italianieuropei*, 3/2008, p.66.

<sup>107</sup>; N. Michelidze: Russia e Turchia nel labirinto del Caucaso meridionale, *Affari Internazionali*, 6 December 2008, available at: <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=1019> (last access: 25 January 2009); C. Frappi: La Turchia e la Piattaforma per la Stabilità e la Cooperazione nel Caucaso, ISPI Policy Brief 106/2008, available at: [http://www.ispionline.it/it/documents/PB\\_106\\_2008.pdf](http://www.ispionline.it/it/documents/PB_106_2008.pdf) (last access: 25 January 2009).

stability and cooperation in the Caucasus, open to Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Russia.<sup>108</sup>

Turkey itself is now the other big question mark in the Italian approach towards the enlargement of the EU. As a recent study by the “International Affairs Institute” underlined, “Italy’s traditionally positive attitude towards Turkey’s entry into the European Union is unlikely to reverse in the foreseeable future”<sup>109</sup>. However, even if the prospect of Turkey’s membership has received wide bipartisan support at the political and business community level, the Italian public opinion has usually been less favourable toward it, due to its cultural and religious background.<sup>110</sup> Moreover, in the last few months, even the perspective of the political elite has changed as a consequence of the outcome of the 2008 Italian general elections. In fact, the Lega Nord, which is a eurosceptical and regionalist party, obtained a remarkable success and now controls key Ministries, including the Ministry of the Interior.<sup>111</sup> In June 2008, the recently appointed Minister of the Interior, Roberto Maroni, presented a resolution to the Italian parliament’s “Camera dei deputati” asking the government to call for an interruption of the negotiations on Turkish membership and to support, instead, Turkey’s inclusion in the Union for the Mediterranean.<sup>112</sup> This attitude will probably have an impact on the overall Italian perception of Turkey’s entry in the European Union.

It may be noted from this overview that in Italy the debate on the future of the European Union’s enlargement is still confined to the intellectual and political level, while the Italian public opinion does not seem to be very informed about it. For this reason, Italians’ opinions on this issue are sometimes influenced by prejudices and misperceptions. According to the last Eurobarometer 47 percent of Italians are in favour of further enlargement of the EU. When asked to give their opinion on single possible new candidate states, they were more sceptical: 58 percent are against the inclusion of Turkey and more or less the same percentage are opposed to the accession of the Balkan countries.<sup>113</sup>

#### **IV. Current issues and discourses in your country**

##### **Concerns about public order and illegal immigration**

- Rise in prices: In the last year the prices of basic goods, such as food, oil and energy, have increased considerably. This issue has been the centre of press articles and interventions by politicians.

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> E. Alessandri/E. Canan: “Mamma li turchi!”: just an old Italian saying, in: N. Tocci (ed.): Talking Turkey in Europe: towards a differentiated communication strategy, Quaderni IAI English Series, 13/2008, p.11.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., pp. 11, 28.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, p.12.

<sup>112</sup> See: Atto Camera: Risoluzione, in: Assemblea 6/00017, Seduta di annuncio 174, 21 June 2007, available at:

[http://banchedati.camera.it/sindacatoispettivo\\_15/showXhtml.asp?highLight=0&idAtto=13479&stile=6](http://banchedati.camera.it/sindacatoispettivo_15/showXhtml.asp?highLight=0&idAtto=13479&stile=6)

(last access: 25 January 2009).

<sup>113</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 69, Spring 2008, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb69/eb69\\_it\\_exe.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb69/eb69_it_exe.pdf) (last access: 25 January 2009).

- Security and crime: Italian public opinion is getting increasingly worried about the lack of public order in some areas of Italy. Episodes of violence are given a lot of space in Italian press and TV shows.

- Immigration: This issue is partly connected to the previous one, because in the last months there has been an increase in illegal immigration. This had led to some episodes of tension in the so-called “Centri di Prima Accoglienza” – the temporary shelters in which the illegal immigrants are hosted until they are repatriated to their country of origin – and sometimes to racist reactions by the Italian public opinion.

- Reform of international institutions and the Italian G8 Presidency: This is an issue of high political salience. The Italian Foreign Minister, Franco Frattini, has repeatedly declared the Italian government’s will to promote and participate in the reform of the international governance system. From the Italian point of view, this is a particularly important topic, since it will be one of the top priorities of the Italian Presidency of the G8 in 2009.

- The conflict in the Middle East: Both the Italian public opinion and the press have shown a particular interest in this topic, which has probably been one of the most covered by the political debate in the last weeks.