istituto affari internazionali
88, viale mazzini • 00195 roma
tel. 315892-354456 • cable: intaffari-roma

IAI8718

ITALIAN POLITICS AND THE SOVIET UNION

Marta Dassù

PREMISE: THE ITALIAN "CASE"

The "Soviet question" has never been, in Italy, purely a matter of foreign policy; it has been, above all, a question of domestic policy, linked to the presence in the country of the largest Communist party in the West. The first fact which characterizes Italy's attitude toward the Soviet Union, as compared with other NATO countries, is therefore the Communist question in its specific evolution over the years.

For the first thirty years after the War, the evidence of links between the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the Soviet Union strongly conditioned the internal life of the country; it was in fact the declared explanation for the "conventio ad excludendum", or the exclusion of the PCI from the government due to its scarce Western reliability. Essentially, the connection between the major opposition party and Moscow justified the "anomaly" of the Italian case: the specificity of a democratic political system long dominated by the hegemony of one particular party, the Christian Democrats (DC) and by the absence of concrete alternatives.

The influence of the Communist factor in domestic policy has had a multifaceted effect on the image of the Soviet Union in Italy. Broadly speaking, it first of all prevented debate on the merits of the Soviet Union, which has instead been the subject of opposing ideological views; the result being that Italy began to study with some seriousness the foreign policy of the Soviet Union much later than other Western countries and - in a rather paradoxical way - under the initial impetus of the PCI's search for autonomy. Even the perception of the Soviet Union as a potential "adversary" was strongly conditioned; it is the problem of the threat from "within" - through the growth of the Communist Party - which prevailed until the '60s and '70s, that made a more comprehensive evaluation of questions of national security a secondary concern.

Moreover, it is worth taking a more general look at the origins of the connection between foreign and domestic policy in Republican Italy. Italy's international position served as the distinguishing factor between government and opposition, the axis upon which matured, immediately following World War II, the split of the antifascist coalition. This fact influenced the "reconstruction" of Italian foreign policy; starting from the Atlantic option of 1949, the basic decisions of Italy in the international arena were posed and regarded as one essential instrument for guaranteeing or reinforcing the stability of the domestic political balance. This particular function of foreign policy - a second characteristic to bear in mind with regard to Italy - explains a number of structural weaknesses, which have been reflected in relations with the USSR: the ideological character of the internal debate on

the main international questions, essentially discussed in terms of a choice of sides ("scelta di campo") between East and West; the consequent tendency of Italian governments to passively support Western choices, trusting to the privileged relationship with the United States the function of political tutelage on the international and domestic scene; the "low profile", as a final outcome, of Italian foreign policy.

If one considers this dimension of the problem, one can say that the evolution of the PCI's international policy, starting from the middle of the '70s - acceptance of NATO and critical detachment from Moscow - tended to influnece one of the formative aspects of the relationship between foreign and domestic policy in Italy. After at least a decade's delay, the PCI has followed the course already taken by the Socialist Party toward adherence to the two fundamental principles - European integration and NATO - with regard to Italy's international position. This made possible, in a climate still marked by the European results of détente, the 1977 Parliament vote for the first joint document on foreign policy (in keeping, domestically, with the exigencies of the "national solidarity" phase). The subsequent debate on INFs, in December 1979, indicated the limits of this convergence (contributing to the new political isolation of the PCI and facilitating the formation of the first five-party government, made up of a coalition between the Christian Democrats, the socialists and "lay" forces); but it also confirmed the existence of a basic consensus, among all the main constitutional parties, as to the essential principles of Italy's international position.

Later, we will see how this new factor will have modified the lines of internal Italian debate on the problems of foreign policy. The important point to stress at this juncture is that the decisive cause of Communist exclusion from government and the "uniqueness" of the Italian political system, are no longer so easily identifiable in the ties between the Communist Party and the USSR. This means that a vital component of the Soviet question in Italy has begun to lose its traditional meaning; the analysis of this change and its tendential effect on the image and perception of the USSR in the Italian context are the subject of the first part of this paper.

It is important to remember, however, that Italy's position vis-à-vis the Soviet Union has not been entirely dominated by domestic policy or by the influence of the Atlantic connection. Even before the '60s, a parallel tendency toward bilateral diplomatic openings to the Soviet Union emerged; subsequent Christian Democratic governments, inclined to anticommunism and anti-Sovietism domestically, began to move in this direction at the level of relations between states. This dual approach - which can probably be mentioned as the third characteristic of the Italian case - had its sources mainly in the period following World War II (reflecting the international view of some Christian Democratic factions); but it also responded to a pre-existing political and diplomatic tradition, about which can be cited two important precedents.

Firstly, the effort on the part of premier Francesco Nitti (despite his prejudices against Bolshevism), between 1911-21, to resolve the Russian question. An effort based on de facto recognition of the new regime; on the objective of avoiding direct conflicts with the Soviet Union, as indicated by the cautious but methodical disengagement of liberal Italy from the interventionist front; and on the close link established between diplomatic initiative and resumption of commercial relations between states. Then followed Mussolini's attempt to relaunch Italy's international ambitions through an alliance with Moscow which, though it failed, nevertheless led to de jure recognition of the USSR in 1924 and to the first trade agreement with the Soviet regime.

Twenty years later, it was the Bonomi government which reestablished diplomatic relations with Moscow, the objective being a relieving of armistice conditions for Italy; in the three years thereafter, until 1947, with the exclusion of the Socialist and Communist parties from national unity governments, Italy would have looked to opening toward Moscow mostly as a means of reinstating herself, through relations with one of the victors, on the international scene.

This tendency - translated into more or less pragmatic initiatives, and often in groundless ambitions - has remained a constant in Italian politics (except for the initial and more acute "cold war" phase) up until the 1980s; from the spirit of mediation demonstrated right in Moscow by some important exponent of the DC (Giovanni Gronchi, Amintore Fanfani) at the beginning of the '60s to the "mini ost-politik" conducted by the Craxi government in 1984-85. Substantially, there has always existed in Italian foreign policy a particular interest in better relations with the USSR and this has always been connected, rather than to security considerations, to economic objectives or international aspirations. However, such aspirations have not, up to now, been translated into signficant results. A legitimate hypothesis is that the change in the domestic political framework, in the sense mentioned initially, gives more force and greater possibility of expression to these Italian diplomatic trends, in the more dynamic context created by the new Soviet leadership.

In order to evaluate such a perspective, certain basic facts must be borne in mind, which influence the Soviet question with regard to the conception and management of Italy's foreign policy. The first is Italy's geographical position; the lack of common borders with Warsaw Pact countries and the existence of two buffer states (Austria and Yugoslavia), render a potential Soviet invasion less immediate than in central European countries. The second is the actual influence, of which mention has already been made, of the international connection: that is to what degree is a traditionally dependent country like Italy conditioned by relations with the United States. The third is the role attributed to the Soviet Union in the area which more directly involves Italy's projection into the international sphere, the Mediterranean; an area where recent conflict has emerged with Washington and about which a new internal debate on foreign policy is currently being waged.

I. THE ITALIAN DEBATE ON THE SOVIET UNION

The best point of departure for tracing the course of the Italian debate on the Soviet Union since the end of World War II is an examination of the positions of the major political parties. One overriding feature of the Italian political system, in fact, needs to be borne constantly in mind: namely that the role of the parties is central or, if you like, inversely proportional to the weakness of the national state. Italy can be termed, essentially, a system of "party government". All key policy decisions are filtered through the party system. This system, which is a permanent feature in the history of the Italian Republic regardless of signs of crisis of the traditional political orgnizations, has first taken the form of the long-term hegemony of the DC (scarcely dented by the "center left" governments of the mid-'60s) and then, in the early '80s, of the formation of a series of coalition governments made up of the DC, the Socialists, and the three small "lay" parties '"pentapartito"). If this associative tendency is the typical dynamics of the Italian political system, negotiation among the coalition parties is the key to the decision-making process.

It is difficult, however, in the case of Italy, to speak of a true debate on the Soviet Union or a true discussion of the policy stance to assume with respect to the USSR. For in reality, this debate has largely been the mirror image of the debate on Italy's position as part of the Western alliance.

The only party to have addressed the question of relations with the USSR with any degree of continuity has been the PCI. And its consideration of the problem has taken a particular course - from its pro-Moscow alignment in the '50s to the declaration of independence in the '70s - which we shall seek to trace in its essential outlines here (1).

1. The PCI and Moscow

The evolution of the relations between the PCI and Moscow has been conditioned by a variety of factors. It can be said, however, that the gradual elaboration of an "Italian road" to socialism - based since 1944 on the rejection of armed insurrection (with the policy shift announced by Secretary Palmiro Togliatti in Salerno) - has formed the principal impulse in the progressively strengthening independence of the PCI. This process, which only began after the end of the Cold War, has had distinct stages. In the first (1956-1968), the PCI did not question its membership in the world Communist movement; rather it sought to modify the movement's orgnizational structure from within. The objective during this stage was the establishment of "polycentrism" (advocated by Togliatti from 1956 on and most notably in his "Yalta Memorial"), which meant the legitimacy of national roads to socialism. The formulation used at the time, "unity in divesity", makes both the innovative side and the limits of the concept clear. A different perspective began to emerge only in the '70s with the PCI's halting effort to develop a new place for itself in the international arena.

Essentially, the Italian Communists' assessment of the Soviet political system and the societies of the Eastern bloc must be interpreted as the mirror image of its internal reflection on the nature and conditions of an Italian national strategy for socialism. From the exaltation of a mythical image of socialism propagated during the years of the Cold War, the PCI shifted gradually to a more critical image, which was anticipated in 1964 in Togliatti's criticism of the "bureaucratic degenerations" of Stalinism but not really elaborated until the subsequent decade (2).

By a similar process though more slowly and more uncertainly, the party modified its assessment of Soviet foreign policy and the global role of the USSR. Through the '50s, as its endorsement of Soviet intervention in Hungary shows, the PCI viewed the solidity of the Eastern bloc and of Soviet power in Europe as the only effective counterweight to the American "threat" and its decisive influence on Italian domestic politics. Starting in 1968, this standpoint began to change. The PCI's condemnation of the invasion of Czechoslovakia was its first public dissent from a Soviet foreign-policy decision.

On all planes of its relations with Moscow, the PCI's reaction to the events in Czechoslovakia marks a watershed, the point of departure for a revision of the party's entire international position. The first step was the European option (the PCI entered the European Parliament in 1969), and it was followed by a formal pro-Western stance (the Fourteenth Congress of the party in 1975 formally accepted Italy's membership in NATO). At the same time, the PCI gave birth to Euro-Communism, a short-lived convergence with the French and Spanish Communist parties that ultimately served as a means of transition to the PCI's official detachment from the organized international Communist movement. This was announced by General Secretary Enrico Berlinguer in 1976 in

the form of a decision no longer to attend the Moscow-sponsored World Congresses of Communist Parties.

Thus the increased emphasis on the European aspect of its identity was the means selected by the PCI to make its international shift of the 1970s less traumatic. This shift was encouraged by domestic political needs, namely the necessity of making the party's new strategy of historic compromise ("compromesso storico") practicable (3). For at the time both the international situation - the development of detente in Europe - and the party's burgeoning political strength (it would take 34.4 per cent of the vote in the Parliamentary elections of June 1976) made it conceivable that the PCI could move directly into the governing majority with an agreement with the DC. By ending its criticism of Italy's fundamental pro-Western option, the party sought to promote that possibility. Regardless of its achievements, then, the shift in the PCIs foreign-policy stance in the 1970s originated in part as a reversal in domestic politics. In this sense it hinged more on the party's acceptance of the international straints on Italy than on a new overall vision of global problems.

This limitation is reflected in the hesitant fashion in which the party reappraised its position vis-à-vis the Eastern bloc in the early '70s. In the wake of the Czechoslovakian events, the Italian Communists began an explicit discussion of the nature of what was called "real socialism". A Communist strand of Soviet studies began to emerge, and while the approach was basically historical (as in the work of Giuliano Procacci and Giuseppe Boffa), the issues tackled were the origins of Stalinism, the structure of the Party and the bureaucratization of the Soviet political system. In the framework of this analysis the PCI published works of the "revisionist" Marxists of Eastern Europe (R. Medvedev, M. Hajek, and so on) in Italy. Somewhat neglected in the works of the Communist scholars was the study of Soviet society and Soviet foreign policy. These were points on which a segment of the liberal Italian press and its commentators came down heavily (as, for instance, in the highly critical reports from Moscow by Piero Ostellino, correspondent of Corriere della Sera).

Moreover, the impact of detente diminished the perception in Italy of the "Soviet threat". As a result, both poles of the ideological vision of the '50s (demonization on the one hand, idealization on the other) were blurred, giving way to more sophisticated analysis.

Nevertheless, the early '70s witnessed a good number of pauses in the Italian Communists' reappraisal of the Eastern "superiority" of socialist societies to the West (4). And this tendency was even more marked in the judgment on Soviet foreign policy. Right to the end of the '70s the international role of the Soviet Union continued to win a positive assessment as a "counterweight" to imperialism in the Third World and the driving force for detente in Europe. Such positions contrasted with the substance of Berlinguer's most markedly innovative statement of the period (1976): namely the assertion that NATO could act as a "protective umbrella" for the construction of democratic socialism in Italy (5).

These contradictions can be explained in two ways. First, there was the need to preserve party unity and reaffirm the Communist identity in a time of internal change. And second was the absolute priority attached to the defense of detente. Until the conclusion of the Helsinki Conference in 1975, the PCI considered agreement with the Eastern bloc on European security essential and rejected the imposition of any prior conditions on the Soviet Union by the West. Typical was the PCI's caution on human rights. Only starting in 1976, with the Final Act of the CSCE safely signed, would the PCI argue against the

CPSU for the absolute value of democratic freedoms and begin to offer open signatories of the "Prague Charter" in 1977. With its condemnation of the invasion of Afghanistan, however the leadership of the PCI began to emit a negative judgment even on the effects of Soviet foreign policy on European detente.

The invasion of Afghanistan was seen as an "act of aggression by the Soviet Union" (6) From then on the PCI would speak of Soviet "power politics", and at the Central Committee meeting of October 1981 it would accuse Moscow of decisive responsibility in the crisis of detente (7). At the center of this new approach to international issues was competition and the arms race between the two superpowers, from which the Italian Communist Party maintained approximately equal distance. That December the Polish crisis provoked a series of warnings by the PCI against Soviet intervention. This position and the denunciation of Soviet responsibility for the coup d'etat in Poland gravely lacerated relations with the PCSU, in what came to be known as the "rupture" (strappo) (8). At this point the process of detachment from Moscow appeared complete. The independence of the Italian Communist Party was proclaimed irreversible. This, at least, is one meaning that could be attributed to Berlinguer's judgment in December 1981 concerning the "exhaustion of the propulsive force" of the October Revolution.

Now, questions regarding the future arise. The first is whether the autonomy of the PCI from the Soviet party will actually be maintained. Doubts have been raised by the improvement in relations following the rise of Gorbachev to power. The January 1986 visit to Moscow by Alessandro Natta, General Secretary of the PCI since Berlinguer's death in 1984, brought the strains of the previous period to an end (9).

Unquestionably the PCI views Gorbachev's new course positively, though cautiously, as an effort - of uncertain outcome given the power struggles in the top leadership of the PCSU - to reform the Soviet political system. The international part of the new line is also appraised positively. It is believed that the crucial importance assigned to economic growth gives the Soviet Union a real, material interest in reaching an arms reduction agreement with the US and spurs the USSR to an overall international policy stance more conducive to the relaxation of the tensions. From this standpoint, the "Gorbachev effect" has been to provoke the first broad discussion within the PCI on the "reformability" of existing socialist systems (10). Divergent theses are held, but the official position is that reform is possible and that it deserves external support, because it would ensure more stable East-West relations and open up the prospect of a gradual evolution of the two blocs, a prospect which the PCI's international line sees as its long-term objective.

This said, however, any return of the PCI to an organic role in the international Communist movement or to dependence on Moscow remains unlikely. And this for at least three reasons. First, the "normalization" of relations with the Soviet party has been counterbalanced by a sharper definition of the new identity of the PCI itself (the theme of the Seventeenth Congress in April 1986). Today the Italian Communist Party calls itself a reformist party in the European left and thus sees its "true" interlocutors as the Socialist and Social Democratic parties.

Second, the leadership of the PCI appears to be united on the principle of independence from Moscow. The consolidation and strengthening of this tendency should be ensured by the naming of Giorgio Napolitano, a forthright proponent of the PCI's transformation into a Western reformist party, to head the party's international bureau.

Third, while the traditional problem of the rank-and-file's "lagging" behind the leadership persists, for cultural and generational reasons it is less serious than in the past. Pro-Soviet activities and groups exist (Circolo Concetto Marchesi in Milan, the journal Interstampa), but their influence is very limited indeed. Nor can it be said that in the last few years the Soviet Union has been very successful in effectively backing its "faction" within the PCI. The few surveys on the matter (11) indicate that Italian Communist Party members and militants have a critical detachment from the Soviet "model" and stress its diversity of their own party. More uncertain is the evaluation of Soviet foreign policy, on which the rank-and-file appears to be divided, and more uncertain still the consensus for the PCI's membership in the Western alignment.

Essentially, if independence from the Soviet model is an established fact, irrespective of the interest aroused by Gorbachev's experiments, the "Western option" of the PCI is less so. Not surprisingly, the differences of opinion, which involve the leadership and not just the rank-and-file, concern policy toward the US and within NATO, the issues on which there were open clashes in the platform debate preparatory to the most recent party congress.

Overt neutralism has no significant political influence, even if the slogan "Italy out of NATO!" was taken up by the Communist Youth Federation, which is now organizationally autonomous. Less clear-cut tendencies appear to count for more, some linked with the new peace movement and others still tied to the traditional "anti-imperialist" vision. These tendencies too were decisively defeated at the Seventeenth Congress, but it is unquestionably in this area - the consistency of the "Western" option - that the Communist position is most subject to critical reservations.

In the debate that has been carried on in Italy since the late '70s on the NATO alliance, the Communist Party - with its opposition to the deployment of INFs and its subsequent active support for the pacifist movement - once again finds itself isolated. The differences no longer concern, as in the past, the acceptance of the Atlantic Alliance per se but Italy's action within it. And here the old conventio ad excludendum against the PCI continues to operate, in a sense, though the motivations are different. The mistrust of the PCI as a responsible force of government is no longer attributed to its ties with Moscow but to its dissociation from all Western collective security measures not founded upon dialogue with the East.

In response to this criticism - i.e. to the accusation of holding a fundamentally neutralist position or exposing Italy to the risk of "Finlandization" - the PCI has sought to develop its own view of Italian and European security. The first official party document on the matter, in November 1986 (12) confirms the NATO option as the linchpin of Italian defense. Using the classical terminology of the Italian left, it calls NATO a "defensive and geographically limited" alliance and indicates the construction of a European pillar within the alliance as the way to build a security policy based on East-West cooperation and gradual, balanced disarmament,. This is a vision, similar enough to that of the West German Social Democrats, that could well be termed "Atlantic pacifism".

Where the PCI would like to exercise its influence, however, is in the more explicitly political realm of East-West relations, offering itself as a new, more credible channel for mediation between Western Europe and the Communist world. We have already seen that detente, partly for domestic political reasons, is an essential objective of Italian Communist foreign policy. The PCI's vision of detente has two main thrusts: the preservation of East-West balance as a guarantee of stability in Europe (many US strategic

choices, such as SDI, are criticized precisely because they allegedly upset this balance); and the prospect of a gradual evolution of both blocs permitting, in the medium term, internal political transformation (democracy in the East both as a goal per se and as indirect legitimation of Communist entry into government in the West) and in the long term their final dissolution. Clearly, reconciling stability and change is no easy matter. In the PCI's view, only an independent European initiative offers some chance of its being accomplished.

The political independence of Europe, albeit within the postwar system of alliances, thus appears to be the cornerstone of the PCI's new international vision. In this framework, there is an effort to enhance the role of the middle-sized powers in the East-West dialogue, partly as a form of pressure on the United States and the Soviet Union and partly as a way of building direct relations between the two Europes. The PCI itself has moved along these lines, with visits by Berlinguer to Rumania and East Germany in December 1983, in a last-ditch effort to stop the installation of European theater missiles.

On this plane - initiatives to encourage detente - a certain amount of "competition" between government and opposition is foreseeable, but competition limited to the best way of managing an Italian Ostpolitik, which is the foreign policy line being followed by the present government. One reason is that the Communist Party will once again try to find in international issues the grounds for domestic political convergence. Highly significant in this regard is Napolitano's statement that unlike home policy, foreign policy should be an area of unity, not confrontation, between government and opposition (14). This approach suggests that the PCI will not be interested in much further elaboration of an alternative vision of Italian foreign policy.

2. The Catholic Milieu and the Soviet Union

The relationship of the Italian Catholic world to the Soviet Union can be viewed from three different, though related, angles: the positions of the DC as party of government; the ideas of the Roman Catholic Church and the various grassroots Catholic associations; and the Ostpolitik of the Vatican as a state with a foreign policy of its own.

It goes without saying that the international policy stance of the Christian Democrats, who have governed uninterruptedly since 1945, is inextricably interwoven with the policy choices of the Italian government. Nevertheless, it would be an oversimplification to assert that there is no distinction between the two (14). For such an approach would lose sight of a fact of interest to an analysis of positions vis-à-vis the USSR, namely the presence within the DC of a diversity of "pacifist" strands. This minority current was vanquished by Alcide De Gaspari in 1949, but it has had a major influence in the cultural and political formation of the Christian Democratic "left". Sometimes dubbed "irenic", these currents have acted to moderate the basic thrust - pro-NATO "loyalty" - of the DC's foreign policy (15).

The historic turning-point was the decision by De Gaspari, then prime minister, in favour of Italian membership in NATO. Historical scholarship has shown that until the end of 1946, or until the time of his trip to the US, the Christian Democratic leader had espoused a rather flexible foreign-policy line including efforts to allay Soviet hostility. De Gasperi repeatedly sought to reassure the Soviet leadership that the government in Rome did not intend to join a putative anti-Soviet bloc and would not subordinate its policy toward the USSR to a preconceived anti-Communist stance. This approach was dropped with the start of the Cold War. From then on, the DC sought US support with an

anti-Communist appeal as well, i.e. warning insistently that the PCI might drive Italy towards the Soviet bloc (16)

Making itself the guarantor of Italy's pro-Western stance, the DC essentially saw US political and economic backing not only as the sole way to promote postwar reconstruction but also as a way to strengthen itself politically against the Communist and Socialist opposition. This linkage explains the political climate of the parliamentary elections of April 1948, after the rupture of the government of national unity. The Christian Democrats won a decisive electoral victory after a violently anti-Soviet and anti-Communist campaign. This linkage further suggests that the Italian decision to join NATO in 1949 stemmed at least as much from domestic political considerations as from the needs of international security, if not more so (17). For the DC, it was essential to consolidate the political victory of 1948. Nonetheless, even within the DC there was some doubt and dissent as regards membership in NATO. These reservations with respect to the Atlantic treaty did not spring from any "pro-Soviet" tendency. Rather they had their roots in an instinctive aversion, connected with the ecumenical, universalist ideals of Catholicism, to Italy's involvement in a military alliance and the system of counterposed blocs.

One such current was that formed by Giuseppe Dossetti around the journal Cronache Sociali. In this analysis, the Cold War was viewed as a clash between two imperialist powers. Italy's natural position as a Catholic country, it asserted, was an intermediate one, as "bridge" between East and West, taking advantage of its capacities as mediator. This view of Italy's position in the international arena - generically equidistant rather than overtly neutral - had important domestic political implications. It was intended to avoid a rupture with the Communists and Socialists, which the Christian Democratic "left" opposed, and prevent Italy from slavishly imitating an American model that won scant sympathy in those circles. Similar considerations, connected with domestic politics and the approach to economic policy, underlay the initial reservations about NATO voiced by Amintore Fanfani and Giorgio La Pira.

Another approach, this one from a European, third-force perspective, was suggested by Giovanni Gronchi. In the eyes of this part of the DC, Italy derived unquestionable benefits from its participation in the Marshall Plan, but this did not necessarily imply membership in the Western bloc, nor should it entail the nation's political subordination to any great power. Another of the initial reservations as to Italy's joining NATO was the line put forward by Aldo Moro in the review Studium: the problematic search for a foreign-policy stance that would give Italy greater international autonomy and a role as mediator in conflicts (an idea was a federation of neutral European countries protected by the US).

These positions were not, however, the precursors of any real alternative, partly because the Catholic "left" was never sufficiently united and partly because, in the absence of international contacts and interlocutors and being put forward in the climate of the Cold War, third-force and neutralist hypotheses were purely theoretical. Moreover, considerable influence was exerted by the openly pro-NATO position of the Vatican under Pope Pius XII. In response to the hard fate of the Catholics of Eastern Europe, the Church accentutated its traditional anti-Soviet stance. This radical confrontation between the Vatican and the Soviet Union, which was to last until the early '60s with the first signals of a thaw launched by Pope John XXIII, was reflected in public opinion. As recent historical accounts have shown, Italian Catholic milieux were already avowedly anti-Soviet in 1945-46 (18).

The positions held by the Christian Democrat left were thus destined to defeat. Yet their influence was more important than the course of the dabate in 1949 would suggest. In general, these political and cultural premises help explain two recurrent strands in the foreign policy of Christian Democratic ministers: the particular stress on Italy's independent role in the Mediterranean, viewed as a special preserve for the nation's foreign policy and its peace initiatives; and the hopeless ambition to achieve for Italy some capacity for mediation in East-West relations as well. These tendencies - and we shall return to this later on - also sought to assist important economic interests, most notably state-owned industrial enterprises. Let us recall, as instances of their subsequent applications, the overture to the Arab world by Fanfani in 1956 and Gronchi's trip to Moscow in 1960, in the course of which the Christian Democratic leader, then President of the Republic, put forward an utterly unrealistic proposal of Italian mediation in the Berlin crisis, which Khrushchev declined on the spot (19).

These same two notions, though in forms less bold - Italy as the "bridge" between Europe and the Arab world and as an active protagonist in detente - constituted the guiding aspirations of Christian Democratic foreign policy in the early '70s as well, when the international climate made it easier to reconcile such positions with the fundamental choice of Atlantic loyalty. During this period for the foreign policy of the DC virtually coincided with that of the government, which had promoted development of better relations with the USSR. In any case, the Christian Democratic concept of detente gives no grounds for maintaining that the DC had any particularly original vision. For sections of the party, the key issue was human rights. But in the international forum in which the DC had engaged in a certain amount of diplomacy, namely the European Parliament, it undertook no important actions.

Christian Democratic foreign policy management was complicated starting in the later '70s by a series of factors: the crisis in US-Soviet relations, the change in the PCI's international line, and above all the diminished strength of the DC's domination of the Italian political system. These difficulties were aggravated in the early '80s by the emergence of potential conflicts with the US (raised by the crisis in the Mediterranean in 1985-86) and by the fact that the direction of a more vigorous foreign policy became an arena of competition between the parties of the governing coalition.

So far the DC has responded uncertainly to these tensions, opting simultaneously for two different paths. On the one hand, starting with the 1979 decision in favour of INFs, "Atlantic loyalty" was reaffirmed in traditional fashion. As Party Secretary Ciriaco De Mita made clear in his report to the Seventeenth National Congress of the DC in 1986, the party again lodged the claim to be the sole guarantor of Western interests in Italy, accepting in principle the Reagan Administration's strategy with respect to the Soviet Union (20). This simplistic response to emerging international problems is further confirmation of the primarily "domestic" uses to which foreign policy has been put. The option of uncritical acceptance of US strategy was considered useful for the objective announced by De Mita in 1983 of transforming the DC into a typical modern Western conservative party. The first signs of wavering over this choice - which was facilitated by the serious weakening of the traditional Christian Democratic "left" in the wake of the assassination of Aldo Moro in 1978 - did not emerge until late 1986 with the crisis of the Reagan Administration (21). Additional confirmation comes from the DC's positive appreciation, at the same time, of the "changes" in the policy line of the new Soviet ruling group (22).

On the other hand, in actual government practice the DC has taken quite a different approach. As we shall see in more detail later, Foreign Minister Giulio Andreotti has taken up and developed the "autonomist" tendencies in Italian policy vis-à-vis Eastern Europe and the Arab world; and in the Sigonella incident he voiced criticism of the United States. Essentially, defining a more consistent Christian Democratic foreign-policy position remains an unsolved problem, and one whose resolution is difficult, since discussion of foreign policy still often appears to be conditioned by competition among the various currents of the DC and between the DC and the other coalition members.

One effect of the declining influence of the Christian Democratic "left" in the '70s, and at the same time of the effort to transform the DC into a modern conservative force and drop its old confessional image, has been the burgeoning of independent Catholic groups, the heirs of the universalist, pacifist, and Third-World tendencies that no longer had any significant representation politically. These were the grassroots Catholic associations (the Associazioni cristiane lavoratori italiane, Pax Christi, and others) that continued, in part, to advocate neutralist theses and whose attention was focused on the issues of peace and underdevelopment. These groups, some of which ended up with decidedly left-wing political positions, have often viewed the Soviet Union in a favourable light, since the West is charged with the primary responsibility for underdevelopment. This explains why the Italian peace movement that developed in 1981 after the choice of Comiso as the site for Cruise deployment in Italy included a substantial representation of Catholic groups. There are also countervailing trends, however: the foundation of Comunione e liberazione, which has reasseerted, though in a new form, a traditional fundamental religious vision with a considerable following among young Italians. This group, although sharing the Third World orientation of the leftwing Catholic groups, is in no way comparable to them and has expressed its reservations regarding the one-sidedness of the peace movement. Its political arm, Movimento popolare, has campaigned energetically on the issue of human rights in the East (acting, for instance, as liaison for the publication of Polish Catholic thought in Italy) and condemned the Soviet political system root and branch.

Additionally, Italian Catholics' perceptions of the Soviet Union and of Eastern Europe have been influenced by the evolving position of the Vatican. The solid pro-Westernism of Pius XII was first superseded by John XXIII's cautious overtures to the Eastern European regimes (23). But above all it was Pope Paul VI who initiated the Vatican's Ostpolitik, paralleling and at the same time rivaling detente in the '70s. The outcome of this shift was the definitive setting aside of the "churches of silence". Under Paul VI's approach, on the contrary, the Vatican tended to establish good relations with the governments of the individual socialist countries. This coexistence-oriented stance also generated some incomprehension, as in the Polish Church, which was more determined in its opposition to the Communist regime. Now, under Pope John Paul II, relations with Eastern Europe have grown more difficult (the Soviet Union refused to allow a visit to Moscow by the Polish pontiff) but also closer and more ambiguous. The handling of the Polish crisis is instructive: the Vatican's criticism of the policies pursued by the Warsaw government was unbridled, but that did not prevent the Vatican supporting internal mediation and, more generally, the effort to find some sort of modus vivendi between church and state in Poland (24).

3. The Socialists and the "lay" parties

Of the principal Italian political forces, the Socialist Party (PSI) was the most abrupt in altering its international stance and its view of the Soviet Union.

Through the mid-'50s the PSI's international line was decisively affected by its pact of unity of action with the Communists. Since the split of 1947, when a wing of the party opposed to the alliance with the PCI and with "totalitarianism" followed Giuseppe Saragat in breaking away to form the Social Democratic Party (PSDI), this united front choice was always on the defensive. At this time the PSI still held to an officially neutral line. This was the reason given for its vote against joining NATO, while the PSDI voted in favour. Actually, it was only certain currents within the PSI that consistently backed neutralism, and these had been shown to be a minority as early as 1948-49. From then on, in the climate of the Cold War, the leadership of the party made a de facto "choice of sides" in favour of the USSR. These were the years when the PSI called the Soviet Union the key force for the maintenance of peace and praised the formation of the people's democracies, which were described as the product of independent, progresive revolutions (25).

This line began to be toned down somewhat in 1953-55, but the real turning-point was 1956, with Pietro Nenni's first analyses of Khrushchev's secret report to the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU (26). Unlike Togliatti, the Socialist leader concluded that owing to its political structure (lack of democracy and pluralism), the Soviet system contained the seeds of Stalinism. His was a critique of the PCI's response to Khrushchev's revelations, aimed at recovering the essential values of the Socialist identity and reaffirming the reasons for their historical differences with the Communists.

This initial recovery of Socialist independence was accentuated in the wake of the Hungarian uprising. The party's ringing condemnation of Soviet intervention in the crisis (which the PSI, moreover, welcomed as the first sign of the dissolution of the two blocs) marked the end of its principle of solidarity with the regimes of the East.

The events of 1956 and the polemics of the day about the Soviet Union began to bring to light a significant trend for relations within the Italian left, which is worth describing in general terms. In the Socialist position, the critical detachment from the Soviet Union (both as a "model" and as a "power") is not just an objective political and ideological heritage that grew ever clearer as the events of the postwar years unfolded. It is also an essential means of distinction with respect to the PCI, one of the decisive areas in which the party sought and constructed its independence of action. This domestic use of the image of the USSR by the minority force of the Italian left (its electoral support has ranged from 10 to 14 per cent) is a recurrent feature at times of sharper competition with the PCI. It was a prominent element, for instance, when the idea of the "left alternative" was dropped after 1976.

The PSI's critical reappraisal of its foreign-policy stance was quicker, but it still raised a series of problems for the party. Unquestionably, its lack of organic ties with the USSR, in sharp distinction from the PCI, enabled it to jettison the principle of solidarity with the world's first socialist revolution with relative ease, though that principle had been more or less formally upheld ever since 1917. A pro-Soviet current remained in the party even after 1956, but it was a minority and would choose to break away in 1964 with the foundation of the tiny "proletarian unity" party (Partito socialista italiano di unità proletaria, PSIUP) (27). The abandonment of the neutralist

line was more complicated, for this was the PSI's true foreign-policy tradition and was reaffirmed as such in the later '50s. Actually, the party's gradual acceptance of Italy's Western ties appears at first to have stemmed from domestic political motivations (an initial rapprochement with the PSDI and then, in 1963, into the "center-left" coalition with the DC) and did not entail an immediate overall revision of Socialist foreign policy.

The presence of two basic tendencies within the PSI - a left wing that was observably "anti-American", especially in the wake of Vietnam, and strongly pro-Third World (one of its most prestigious leaders was Riccardo Lombardi), and a "pro-independence" center-right favouring a decisive pro-Western turn - effectively prevented any clearer decision. Throughout the '60s mediation between the two positions was possible only on the basis of a strong emphasis on the PSI's pro-European stance and a "minimalist" view of NATO (28).

This helps explain why, except for Nenni's brief tenure as foreign minister in 1969, the PSI's contribution to the development of Italian foreign policy was not very significant in those years. On the whole, the party's line was based on several key points: enthusiasm for detente in Europe (the crisis in Czechoslovakia was viewed as confirming the need for progress in that direction (29), with explicit support for the actions and the approach of the West German SPD and the long-term goal of transcending the division into blocs; primary interest in issues concerning European integration; and an ambition to develop Italian policy initiatives in the Mediterranean, though this remained rather hazy until the '70s. As to relations with the Soviet Union, it would be hard to say much more, aside from the sharp condemnation of the invasion of Prague. If anything, Socialist pressure on the Italian government to grant diplomatic recognition to the People's Republic of China could have been an indirect source of irritation to the Soviets.

This relatively passive stance began to give way to a more energetic approach in the mid-'70s with the defeat of Francesco De Martino as party secretary and the steady rise of Bettino Craxi. The subsequent evolution of the PSI's position on international affairs and its view of the Soviet Union falls into three stages.

The first (1976-79) saw the Craxi leadership, centering on the 1978 "progetto socialista", initiate a new critical rethinking both of the ideological roots of the workers' movement and of the regimes of Eastern Europe. The result was a radical distancing of the party from "real socialism". This aspiration was underscored with respect to the PCI (this was the period of "national solidarity" governments, and the PSI had to maneuver to keep from being crushed between the two major parties) and was used above all to better define the nascent image of the Socialist Party. Essentially, the critique of the societies of the Eastern bloc was part of the plan for a radical transformation of the PSI's image implemented by Craxi. An important role in this political operation was played by the party's theoretical review, MondOperaio. Since then, it has published a series of analyses of the Soviet Union, partly the work of dissident Soviet intellectuals such as Victor Zaslavsky and partly of ex-Communist Italian political scientists. Thus Italian Socialist culture adopted a series of concepts that are sharply critical of the Soviet experience: "totalitarian" regime, "imperialist" and expansionist power, etc.

It is worth noting that these conclusions, which resemble the path traveled by a portion of French intellectuals, have been retained ever since. MondOperaio is among the Italian political journals most strongly skeptical of the "illusions" stimulated by the new Soviet leadership. The Socialist monthly trends on the one hand to rule out the possibility of reform of the Soviet

political system and on the other to dismiss as propoganda moves Gorbachev's proposals on disarmament or his initiatives toward Western Europe. The conclusion, explicit or implicit, is that the "Soviet threat" remains unaltered (30). This line, perfectly consistent with the original turnabout in Socialist foreign policy, is much less so with the course of Italian diplomacy since Craxi's accession to the post of prime minister in August 1983. The discrepancy may be a harbinger of new internal differentiation within the party, but it might merely reflect the need for a certain amount of "division of labour" to permit the PSI to act with a degree of flexibility in foreign affairs.

To return to the origins of this evolution, one of the practical consequenes of the choices made in 1976 has been much more active, vigorous support to Soviet-bloc dissenters. Such backing has taken the form of Italian Socialist participation at the "Biennial of Dissent" in Venice in 1977; of a provocative proposal, in 1978, for the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops from Prague; and the election of Jiri Pelikan, a Czechoslovak exile, as one of the party's member of European Parliament.

The next stage opened in 1979 with the debate over INFs in Europe and was further clarified in the early '80s. During these years the PSI sought above all to annex the role of the indispensable element in government, the decisive factor that could tip the scales in the formation of coalitions. This political strategy, which in practice implies the long-term exlcusion of the PCI from the majority and a partnership with the DC on a more equal and more competitive basis, had immediate repercussions for the party's course in international affairs. The priority - attained first and foremost by Socialist endorsement of the intallation of intermediate-range missiles in Europe - was credibility, most especially with the US, as a crucial government party in an important NATO country.

If the endorsement of NATO's 1979 decision on the INFs provoked some internal strains (the emergence of a dissenting leftwing current headed by Claudio Signorile), the pro-Atlantic line was more sharply delineated over the next two years, when for the first time a Socialist, Lelio Lagorio, held the post of Minister of Defense. The PSI naturally continued to promote detente and the Geneva talks. But the most significant tendency is the one just noted, which translated, among other things, into the launching of polemics against the Italian peace movement, which was accused of unilateralism and subservience to the PCI, against the creeping neutralism of the Communists, and against Soviet attempts to foment division between Western Europe and the United States. These were also the years in which the PSi argued openly within the Socialist International against the stance of the SPD, which was attacked as "soft" on the USSR. The impression of a turning-point was strong enough to lead one American scholar - certainly sensitive to the possibility of a Socialist "alternative" in Italy - to the following conclusions in 1982:

> Socialist Party positions on foreign affairs - its long-standing assertions that terrorism is probably orchestrated by Moscow; its opposition to Western dependence on the USSR for energy; its support for TNF in Italy; and its suggestions that the PCI confrontation with Moscow is just a tactic designed to gain the latter more legitimacy in Italy and the West - constitute a striking parallel with the posture assumed by the Reagan Administration. This has not gone unnoticed in Italy. Indeed, the party looms as a more steadfast supporter of NATO and US policies than is true of most of the European Left and perhaps even some of the Right" (31)

This assessment encompasses the full range of the trajectory traveled,

relations with the Soviet Union included, but tends to overestimate its scope. In August 1983, in fact, with Craxi's assumption of the premiership, a new phase opened, in which the PSI swiftly adopted a more balanced position, first and foremost on East-West relations. The Socialist approach to relations with the East now focused on three objectives:

1. The overriding priority of East-West dialogue and detente, which implies the dropping of preconceived hostility to Soviet proposals (32). Socialist thinking continued to perceive the Soviet Union as a threat to European security, primarily because of the Warsaw Pact's conventional superiority (33). The response suggested, however, was to press for negotiations, seen as indispensable. Rejecting all ambitions of military superiority, American and Soviet alike, the party backed a conception of European security based on the balance of forces at the lowest possible level. (In this connection the PSI, like all other Italian parties for that matter, endorsed the "zero option".).

2. An effort to attain this goal - deemed consistent with the specific interest of Europe - through more vigorous autonomous Italian initiave. This amounted to a declaration of non-subservience in intra-Western relations which corresponded quite well to the PSI's basic style in domestic politics.

3. The objective of encouraging change within the Eastern bloc, seeking to strike the delicate balance between cooperative relations and forms of pressure.

In the evolution of Socialist politics, then, the radical critique of the Soviet Union marked a crucial stage in rebuilding the party's image and in carrying out the domestic political program of competitive alliance with the DC and the minor "lay" parties. This program implied accentuated polemics with respect to the PCI. Though the criticism took new forms, the PSI continued to judge the PCI's detachment from the Communist world as insufficient (as is shown by the polemics engaged in September 1986 on the thirtieth anniversary of the Hungarian uprising) (33) and to consider that this disqualified the PCI as a potential legitimate government party.

In the international arena, having carried out the shift of 1979, the PSI appears to have focused on relaunching the European ideal attaching increased importance to cooperation among the parties of the European left on security issues, relations with the East, and regional crisis management, especially in the Mediterranean, the area of most immediate interest to Italy.

It is likely that the Liberals and the Republicans (the small "lay" parties, with electoral supporting fluctuating between 3 and 5 per cent) will continue to oppose any excessively "autonomous" foreign policy moves, citing the overriding need for close relations with the US. And this not simply because that is what has happened in the last two years but also because these parties have been, historically, Italy's "true" Atlantic forces (34).

As early as the immediate aftermath of the war, with Carlo Sforza as foreign minister, the Republic Party has taken the most "organic" vision of Italian-American relations. In its conception, membership in NATO was necessary in order to defeat the traditional nationalistic tendencies and to anchor the country solidly to the Western democracies (35). As a consequence, the Soviet Union has been viewed from the NATO perspective, i.e. as the core of the enemy deployment. This view is more attentive to international considerations - condemnation of Soviet foreign policy, the stress on security needs - than to domestic political concerns. The PRI has always been much less prone than the DC to enter into ideological confrontations with Communism or to exploit the issue of relations with the USSR to keep the PCI at bay. A good instance is the favourable reaction of Ugo La Malfa, the historic leader of the party, to Communist statements on NATO in 1975-76.

Given the overriding importance attached in any case to US-European solidarity, the PRI's approach to relations with the East tends to stress consultation and coordination with Washington. This explains why, for instance, the PRI presented Italy's concurrence in NATO's INF decision in 1979 as a political choice (defending the solidity of the alliance) at least as much as a military one. In this framework, of course, any sort of "national" vocation for Italy's foreign policy is rejected - specifically its "Mediterranean" mission, especially if this entails attempted mediation with the radical Arab world, to which the PRI, whose views are close to those of the Israeli Labor Party, is decidedly hostile.

If the foregoing helps explain the terms of the debate within the pentapartito over how Italy should act within NATO, it would be mistaken to draw the conclusion that the PRI is more inclined than the other parties to a policy of confrontation with Moscow. A recent proposal by Giovanni Spadolini, PRI secretary and minister of defence, is significant in this light: he suggested involving the Soviet Union in a policy of international cooperation against terrorism. Moreover, the Republicans have shown constant interest in arms control talks. In a sense, indeed, it can be argued that the party sees the real axis of future global politics not in the East-West confrontation but in the conflict between North and South (37). For the PRI, the ideal prospect would be to involve the East, as part of the developed world, in united action by the North to manage international crises (which corresponds, at the domestic political level, to the announced goal of "Westernizing" the PCI to produce greater poliical stability in Italy and permit the launching of a new economic policy).

4. The image of the Soviet Union in Italy

On the whole, the image of the Soviet Union offered to Italian public opinion by the nation's political parties is now comparatively unideological. This view corresponds to the approach of the main mass media as well.

A survey of the way the major national newspapers cover Soviet politics yields four conclusions:

1. There is substantial interest in the USSR (as against the traditional Italian indifference to international issues), and this interest has certainly increased since Gorbachev's rise to power.

2. There is a debate under way on trends in Soviet politics that involves the reformability of the Soviet political system and the room for revision in Soviet international strategy. The two leading dailies are divided on the question. La Repubblica is inclined to take the internal changes seriously as well as the possibility of a foreign policy shift which Europe and the US have every interest in encouraging. Il Corriere della Sera, by contrast, remains extremely skeptical and warns of the danger of psychological "disarmament" by the West.

3. As a whole, the view of the Soviet Union as a "threat" to European and Italian security - the 1979-83 debates on the INFs now definitely behind us - is very much in the background. The Soviet Union is still a "rival" power, of course, but the tone is not allarmist.

4. If the rise of Gorbachev has produced any evident effect, it is a shift in the reasons for interest in the Soviet Union. The focus is now on social issues, changes in the cultural scene, internal Soviet political and economic choices more than on the question of military strength (38).

This debate is also found in the few specialized international affairs journals. Politica internazionale warrants mention as an exemplar of open-mindedness to the USSR, favourable to a revival of detente, and interested in integrating the Soviet Union as a factor of equilibrium in a more flexible international system (39). Contrasting views, more concerned with defense problems and with the military balance vis-à-vis the East, have been expressed, again citing one publications as an example, by Strategia globale.

The same relatively relaxed attitude appears to be prevalent in Italian public opinion as well. Opinion pools in the early '80s (40) have yielded the following overall findings.

First, the main concerns of Italians are still domestic economic and social problems (unemployment). If there is still a profound apathy, and an even more striking ignorance on international affairs issues, the debate on INFs did nonetheless suceed in making nuclear war a seriously perceived danger. This fear was at its height at the time of greatest tensions between the superpowers and with the deployment of the first Cruise missiles in Italy (November 1983). It has moderated in the course of the last two years.

Second, in June 1984 the Soviet arms buildup was still seen as the main source of international tension. But if the blame attached to US military choices and that assigned to US-Soviet competition are considered, one concludes that Italian public opinion sees the prime factor in world instability and the chief threat of war as stemming from the confrontation between the two superpowers.

Third, and most significant, is a finding which the first two points help explain: namely that faced with Soviet power, public opinion does not appear inclined to opt for a military response. The majority of Italians see the inadequacy of defense systems as a matter of utterly minor concern. This attitude affects responses on NATO's decision to deploy INFs in Europe as well. All the polls taken between 1981 and 1983 found substantial opposition (on the average, about 50 per cent) to the deployment of Cruise missiles in Italy. And in November 1983, 35 per cent of respondents said they favoured the unilateral withdrawal of nuclear weapons from Western Europe "regardless" of what the Soviet Union did.

To interpret these findings as evidence of the existence of significant pro-Soviet sectors in Italian public opinion, or neutralist currents properly so called, is misleading. The majority does not question the principle of membership in NATO. What the polls, as well as some newspaper commentaries, do indicate is diminished confidence in NATO's military choices and in US strategy. For the majority of Italian public opinion, dialogue and detente remain the best guarantee of Italian and European security. The Italian case thus provides confirmation of the conclusions drawn by studies on other European countries - namely a gap between European and American public opinion regarding the perception of the Soviet threat.

The motive of critical detachment from the Reagan Administration's approach to international affairs was confirmed by reactions to the Achille Lauro and Sigonella episode. In the confrontation between Italy and the United States, the majority of Italians approved the stance taken by the Craxi government.

1. Post-war Heritage

The take-off point in the post-war evolution is the Italian decision, a few months after the signing of the Armistice (September 8, 1943), to request Moscow's recognition of the Badoglio government. An initiative led by Ambassador Renato Prunas with two objectives in mind: the breaking of Italy's international isolation through resumption of relations with one of the victor countries; and the attempt to obtain a softening of the Armistice clauses (41).

Subsequently, that is up till 1947, the Italian government attempted to take advantage of these new diplomatic channels with Moscow in order to obtain better conditions in the protracted discussions on the Peace Treaty, signed in February that year. This policy - in which could be seen the only "neutralist" phase in post-war Italian history - did not meet with success for various reasons (42). In the first place, because of the rigid international constraints imposed on the country. Her defeat in World War II had in fact signalled a definitive defeat for Italy as a "power"; the conflict left her in decline, deprived of an autonomous international role and quite dependent externally. From 1945, relations between the United States and the Soviet Union dominated Italian foreign policy, with a progressive narrowing of the limits of autonomy sought by Rome. The USSR, on the other hand, immediately viewed relations with Italy in a global context; on the part of Moscow, of the Western decision to exclude her from control of the Southern part of the country, can be read as one of the first indications of the logic behind the division of Europe into spheres of influence (43).

There existed between Italy and the Soviet Union direct reasons for conflict: the problem of war reparations and above all the Trieste question, considering Soviet support for Yugoslav claims. In both matters, Italian efforts to steer Moscow towards a more favourable course were unsuccessful. In particular, hopes of obtaining mediation with Tito through Moscow were dashed (Togliatti's direct attempt at mediation in November 1946 arrived at a conclusion unacceptable to the Italian government: a swap between Gorizia and Trieste). In fact, the Trieste matter became the central point of contrast with the Soviet Union (44). The break between Stalin and Tito, in 1948, somewhat tempered the weightiness of the problem in bilateral relations with the USSR (a problem partially resolved in the London agreement of 1955, but dispensed with completely only in 1975, with the signing of the Osimo Pact between Italy and Yugoslavia); nevertheless, the outbreak of the Cold War had in any case introduced an irreparable fracture between the USSR and the Western countries, to which, in fact, Italy belonged following acceptance of the Marshall Plan.

The Soviet presence in negotiations on the Peace Treaty was quite palpable: contrary to initial Italian hopes (more or less fed by the not all together negative stance of the USSR with regard to the problem of the colonies, which involved the initial proposal, not supported by England, of an Italo-Soviet joint administration of Tripolitania), Moscow's position in the end was harmful to Rome, favouring rigidity with respect to the Treaty clauses. These divergences and the failure of Italian efforts to reinstate herself in the international scene, also thanks to the Soviet Union, were underlined by Moscow's repeated vetos vis-à-vis Italy's entrance into the United Nations (subordinate to the entrance of her East European allies).

The facts of 1947 contained the premises for subsequent choices. Already at the time that the Trade and Navigation Treaty was signed (December 1948) (45), Italian foreign policy was clearly oriented towards the "western" option.

Both the international situation and domestic policy objectives in fact pushed De Gaspari and Sforza towards the Atlantic Alliance, a decision generally supported by the Diplomacy, except for the then neutralist position of Italy's ambassador to Moscow, Manlio Brosio (46). During the next decade, relations between Italy and the USSR remained frozen amidst the tensions between East and West; so cold politically were these ten years that today this period is officially "forgotten" by both governments (46).

The end of the Cold War and the first steps towards detente were in short a necessary prelude to the resuming of relations, just gotten underway between 1944 and 1948. Only in 1958, in fact, did the bilateral problems inherited from the conflict begin to be overcome. Moscow assumed a more flexible attitude on the question of reparations and most of all on the Italian request of a revision - to which the USSR had been opposed in 1947 - of both the preamble of the Peace Treaty as well as of a number of its military articles (among which was one relating to the demilitarisation of some lesser Mediterranean islands). With the joint communique of 1959 regarding complete repatriation from the USSR of Italian prisoners of war - a central point in anti-Soviet polemics in Italy in the 1950s - direct reasons for conflict appeared by this time diminished (47).

2. The period of detente

Thus began a new phase in Italian policy towards the USSR, characterised by two main facts:

1. concrete action undertaken by Christian Democratic ministers by the signing of various cooperation agreements between 1965 and 1967 in support of national economic interests;

2. The much more abstract tendency by Italian governments - but especially by some of their exponents - to attribute to these relations and to a dialogue with Moscow a notably political significance, indicative of their nation's supposed regaining of international prestige. Moreover, this was, as previously stated, a matter of unjustified ambitions. Two fairly important facts should be kept in mind, however. The first is the visit to Rome of the Foreign Minister Gromyko in 1966. In Soviet historiography, a certain importance was generally acorded to this visit, as attested to by the fact that a proposal for a conference on security and cooperation in Europe was announced at the time (48). It was Fanfani, then Foreign Minister, who was the spokesman for the Soviet proposal at the next NATO Council meeting, thus initiating the still existing tendency on the part of Italy to propose itself as a channel of communication between East and West. This objective - communication - in effect worked better than did the much more ambitious one of an actual mediation.

These diplomatic tendencies consolidated themselves in the early '70s, with the inclusion of Italy in the high wave of detente in Europe. In this new and favourable context, Aldo Moro (Foreign Minister) and Giulio Andreotti (Prime Minister) outlined a policy towards the East based on the following points:

1) reinforcement of the bilateral political dialogue, sanctioned by a Consultation Agreement (October 26, 1972), the first such agreement between a Western European government and the USSR (49);

2) participation in the preparatory work of the CSCE;

3) the recurring Italian tendency of stressing a possible Soviet contribution toward solution of regional conflicts (Middle East, Southeast Asia), as an indirect means for maintaining a certain distance from American policy in these areas.

On the whole, the salient characteristic of Italy's position with regard to multilateral relations between East and West is her attempt to work a connection between a dawning European security and the problems of security in the Mediterranean, trying in this way to combine the various "inclinations" of national foreign policy ((50). This approach - which characterised Italy's participation to the CSCE process - can in any case be considered a constant in Italian multilateral diplomacy since it was retained, even after 1975, as a means of carrying out and putting the Final Act of Helsinki to the test.

Much more vague and somewhat of a "facade" appears the Italian delegation's initial insistence - in the preparatory phase of the CSCE - on the theme of human rights; already in 1973, in a speech in Parliament (51), Aldo Moro clarified that Italian policy was based on the priority of detente, in an effort to combine respect for fundamental liberties and a policy of non-interference into the internal affairs of other countries, as well as on strong reservations towards the use of prejudicial conditions with regard to the East. This policy was elaborated on in the succeeding years, until it became a reason for dissension with respect to United States' policy.

Italy - like Germany - is substantially in favour of a step-by-step strategy: the application of the third Helsinki "basket" is considered possible only by means of "small steps" (the formula used officially by Andreotti, as Foreign Minister, in 1985-86) and subsequent partial agreements. The United States' policy (under Carter but most of all under Reagan) is consequently considered rigid and counterproductive; in the Italian diplomatic opinion, Washington's "maximalist" tactics has actually prevented potential agreement such as the one that emerged in Berna regarding the document of non-aligned and neutral countries, which Rome supported in principle (52).

On human rights issues in East-West relations, Italian diplomacy has in any case obtained some results; in particular, pressure on the Warsaw regime seems to have brought about the political amnesty of September 1986. And this development in its turn facilitated Jaruzelski's visit to Rome in January 1987, although it was not without polemics (Italian labour union protests) (53).

Returning, though, to the '70s, it would be difficult to see in Italian policy towards the USSR much more than an intelligent exploitation - on the part of middle-sized European power, with fairly specific economic interests but without valid foreign policy tools - of openings resulting from international detente. New incentives, even if in the declining phase of USA-USSR relations, came then from the evolution of the domestic political picture. With the two parliamentary motions of 1977 (54), approved by all the main constitutional parties, Italian foreign policy positions found consensus for the first time. In theory, this convergence would have stimulated a new impetus in Italian diplomacy and - as the text of the passed motions indicates - her special commitment towards European construction and detente. Actually, it was employed principally as a means of cementing national unity in a period when Italy was on her knees due to grave domestic difficulties (economic crises and terrorism).

In this context, the crisis in US-USSR relations quickly dashed the Italian expectations in the prospectives of detente. Beginning in 1979, then, the Italian government had to face a central problem, shared by many other European countries: the matter of how to reconcile traditional interests with regard to cooperation with the USSR and the priority of coordinating Western policy in East-West relations.

3. The debate on INF

Italian debate on the INF ((55) - the first big parliamentary and public debate on questions of security held in the country following the 1949 Atlantic option - aids in clarifying two points: evaluation of the Soviet military "threat" during the crisis phase of detente; the factors which influence government choices in matters of security and of military balance between East and West.

Italy's joining NATO decision of December 1979 was justified by the Cossiga government in terms of a technical-military argument: the existence of a nuclear imbalance in Europe favouring the USSR. The political consequences of this perceived Soviet military superiority were put in the forefront of the parliamentary debate. The government forces insisted that the USSR, with the deployment of its SS-20, has acquired new possibilities of political intimidation towards Europe. On the other hand, both the Socialist Party as well as sectors of the DC have emphasized rather the second "track" of the decision, which provided for the opening of negotiations between the US and the USSR on nuclear balance in Europe. Consequently, the decision on the INF was presented (after German Chancellor Schmidt's view) as the obligatory road leading to a broadening of the SALT talks to include problems of European security. Emphasizing this connection, the motion approved by the majority (DC, PSI, PLI, PEI, PSDI) commited the government to deploy cruise missiles while favouring at the same time arms control and detente. On its part, the PCI opposed the Italian decision requesting instead a delay (a "moratorium") of the decision; in its view, announcing INF deployment (foreseen for 1983) did not facilitate the opening of talks on nuclear balance in Europe, but rather made it more difficult (57).

From the Italian government's standpoint, in substance, the problem of security posed by the USSR tended to be perceived, in 1979, in this light: an increase in potential military capabilities, to be faced through the combined tools of defence and detente. Instead, there was no special emphasis - not even during the parliamentary debate - (not counting the minority on the extreme right) on the East's actual will to pose a military threat. More precisely, the crisis of detente has brought to the fore, in the Italian political world, the question of the USSR as a problem of long-term security for Europe; but this fact was not exploited to the point of producing alarming or more specific declarations on an actual growing military threat to Italy.

This tendency was confirmed, even after the invasion of Afghanistan, by new discussions on problems of Italian defense, conducted within the first lay government (Spadolini). On the whole, the eventuality of a Soviet attack on the Northeastern borders - the usual "scenario", suggested from 1949 onwards - has tended to be put back into perspective by the experts and by the Italian military, while emphasizing instead the new tensions in the Mediterranean and the necessity for a more concrete role on the part of Italy on NATO's Southern flank. Typical of the concept is the argument with which the Socialists (just when one of their exponents, Lelio Lagorio, was Defence Minister) denied in 1981 introduction into Italy of the N Bomb: the absence of immediate threats on the Northeastern borders and the desire not to increase tensions with the East (58). It should be mentioned that this military policy - a rebalancing towards the Mediterranean of Italian forces - was elaborated in the following years until being included in the 1985 White Paper on Defense.

A preliminary conclusion can be found. In the present Italian political context, the more or less ideological use of a Soviet "threat" is evidently no longer considered - as it was in the '50s - a tool for consolidating domestic balance or to build consensus. Rather, it is the search for a policy towards the East based on military balance and detente - according to the classical

NATO outline of 1967 (Harmel Report) - which gives greater guarantees in this direction.

Next to these internal political motivations, a second essential factor - the importance of Atlantic solidarity in the context of Italy's international image - made itself felt in the decision-making process. It must be remembered that the Italian choice was a determining factor, considering the "non-singularity" condition posed by the RFT, for the implementation of the NATO decision. A position that the government tried to exploit in order to gain status which appeared compromised by its exclusion, in January of 1979, from the Guadeloupe summit.

The case of the missiles indicates then that Italian security policy in the context of East-West relations tends to be influenced by two different and not very compatible components: the function of international and domestic legitimation that the government and parties continue to attribute to the privileged relationship with the United States and to full suport of NATO choices: the new perception, more pronounced in public opinion, that national interests are not always defended appropriately by American policy and are in any case guaranteed only through dialogue and talks with the East.

The potential contradiction between these two elements was of course sharper during the period of greatest tension between the two superpowers, in 1981-82. What characterised Italian diplomacy was perhaps the attempt to favour a coordination between the positions of the EEC and those of the Americans (59): as opposed to the option taken by France and Germany, the government led by Spadolini (October 1981) rejected mediatory overtures towards the USSR. Instead it seeked, on the one hand, to consolidate European political cooperation (in this context Italy adopted sanctions against the USSR certainly milder than those applied by Washington); and, on the other hand, to aim for a settling of differences with the United States. As another guideline, Italy began to emphasize its specific contribution to NATO strategy through the option of assuming, for the first time, military commitments in the Middle East and in the Mediterranean: the expedition of a contingent to the Sinai; participation in the Multinational Force in Lebanon and in mine removal operations in the Red Sea.

The result of this effort to present Italy as a less passive and more responsible NATO partner was a great opening of credit on the part of the United States (it was the time during which Washington spoke of Rome as its trusted ally); but there was also a troubling stalemate in bilateral relations with Moscow.

A number of prospects opened up with the resumption of talks in Geneva; in a climate of relative reduction in tensions between the United States and the USSR, the government presided over by Craxi and his Foreign Minister, Andreotti, has initiated a relaunching of relations with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

This relative dynamism in Italian foreign policy, under the aegis of the first lay governments, has led the experts to talk about its "emerging profile" (following 30 years of a rather low profile) (60). The important point here is that the Ostpolitik - or better the "mini" detente carried out by Rome towards the East in 1984-86 - is considered a fundamental attitude in this phase of growth in Italian foreign policy.

4. The Italian "mini" Ost-politik

At the declaratory level, the innovations in the formulation of Italian diplomacy - generally based on confirmation of its three historic constants: the Atlantic Alliance, the European Community, the Mediterranean - lie within two factors: the higher priority attributed to the international initiative itself, as part of government policy (61); the emphasis given to Italian autonomy as a nation capable of formulating its own foreign policy while honouring its treaties (62). The "mini" detente is part of this search for international space. In relations with the East, Italy sees a dual role for herself: the possibility of offering channels of communication to the two superpowers during the phase of maximum tension, a fairly modest and credible objective, which was in fact often utilised by the USSR; the possibility - through contacts with Eastern European countries - to strengthen the capability of lesser European powers to press for dialogue and talks.

This approach is obvious from the reaction to the very laborious preliminaries and to the turn taken in the Geneva talks; reactions characterized by a very prompt official willingness to take account of Soviet proposals, considered a sign of the Soviet will to talk, and by rejection of prejudicial conditions. A good indication of this approach is the very optimistic appraisal of the outcome of the Reykjavik summit.

In the actual enactment of this policy, Italy is oriented in three directions:

1. an improvement in bilateral relations with the USSR, supported by political contacts and by economic cooperation; an improvement which in effect occurred in 1984-85, resolving the crisis of the previous three years and which should continue, given the political expectations which the Italian government has invested in the new Soviet leadership (63);

2. the development of bilateral contacts with various Eastern European countries (Bulgaria, with a normalisation of relations following tensions which emerged around the "Bulgarian" connection during investigation into the attempt on the Pope; the German Democratic Republic, Hugnary and Poland), as a means of stitching up little by little and through the good offices of the medium-sized powers European detente;

3. the commitment already mentioned in multilateral East-West fora, with a rather active participation in the final phase of the Stockholm Conference.

There has remained - in the Italian foreign policy - quite a bit of confusion and improvisation (64). There is also ample difference between the declarations of intent and results obtained; on the whole, though, Rome's policy seems more dynamic than it once appeared, and above all based on the idea that the lesser powers of the two blocs ahve a role to play in safeguarding the advantages of detente in Europe.

This policy was encouraged by two premises, one of international order and the other of an internal nature. With the evolution in transatlantic relations, Italy, like other European nations, found it had to assume greater initiative in foreign policy; with the evolution of the domestic political situation - towards the consensus about which we have already spoken with respect to the fundamental choices of her international position - Italy found it could do so. when the international climate became more favourable As an outcome, foreign policy management became a ground for competition; a factor that will mark a certain recovery of Parliament's role (as the debate on INFs has anticipated) and a reduction of the substantial delegation which Italian governments have enjoyed in this area for years.

Since the characteristics of the political system (which is multi-party but no longer has any dominant political force) continue to require the formation of coalitions, the management of Ost-politik will remain oriented

generally along lines of mediation outlined in recent years. The margins for movement in Italian diplomacy in East-West relations seem then, in perspective, fairly rigidly fixed, even in the case of majority changes.

On the other hand, the formation of domestic consensus on the policy towards the East will be much smoother until the Italian diplomatic trends do not produce negative effects on relations with the United States, something which in effect has not occurred in the last three years; otherwise, political forces will again split themselves up in fairly predictable ways.

In another area - the Mediterranean - this fact has already clearly emerged. The disputes which have arisen between Italy and the United States following the "Achille Lauro" affair ahve produced a governemnt crisis on problems of foreign policy (October 1985). Mediterranean policy, in fact, is that area which is more likely to produce tensions with Washington and where domestic options seem greater. A principal "historic" option - nurtured by Foreign Minister Andreotti in the last few years - is that of sectors of the DC as supporters of autonomy for Italy both in the Mediterranean and in the Arab world; into this context fall the more or less open contacts - concerning economic interests or political objectives, such as reducing terrorism in Italy - held by Rome with the radical regimes linked to the USSR, such as Syria and Libya. Major opposition to this approach comes from the Republicans, supporters of a necessary coordination of Western policies. These "autonomous" tendencies are instead supported by the PCI and, even if with great care, by the Socialist Party: generally, the PSI and Craxi, as Prime Minister, have defended the specificity of interests and of Italian policy in this area attempting to anchor it to the vague scheme of a Euro-Mediterranean "pole".

From this range of pressures, a concrete foreign policy line emerged in rather contradictory fashion. On one side, under the pressure of the Defense Ministry, Italy took advantage of her role as a NATO Southern flank nation in the Mediterranean, where the Soviet Union has acquired new projection capabilities. On the other side, the viewpoint of both the Foreign Minister and Prime Minister (response to the Libyan crisis, Middle East policy, attitude towards the PLO and Syria, aid to developing nations who are linked to Moscow, etc.) indicate that the USSR is not seen as the determining factor in regional tensions in this area and that, above all, the effort to "separate" these tensions from East-West conflict is considered primary. In the Mediterranean, the difficulty is even more evident due to the American bases in Italy and to the ambiguity of agreements relative to their use (as NATO or as United States bases). In any case, potential tensions with the United States seem most likely to stem from the problem of coordinating "out of area" NATO policy, and from the reaction to the Soviet presence in the Third World.

Regarding European security choices, Italian diplomacy will tend to conform in a relatively passive way to NATO policy. At this level, the American strategic posture will have decisive influence on Italian room of manoeuvre towards East. This not only true, obviously, for multilateral Western policy; in this context the only probable conflicts are related to the economic dimension (sanctions, exchange of technology etc.) of Western security policy. The course of US-USSR relations will also tend to reflect on Italy's bilateral relations, if in lesser measure than in the past. Here it is worth mentioning, for example, the negative movement that support of the SDI, even if limited to the research aspect alone, brought about during one phase of relations with Moscow in 1986. Many other factors, and above all international Soviet problems, have probably contributed to the delay of Gorbachev's visit to Italy (set for January 1987); but certainly the management of bilateral policy is exposed to external pressures. In general, the Italian government has tended to

resolve this potential contradiction through reference to the European framework and in particular to political cooperation, a framework which could strengthen national policies.

Besides the external pressures, discussion and management of Italian policy in East-West relations will continue to be influenced by domestic policy objectives. Both the case of the pipeline (see below) and that of INFs indicate that the relevance of this connection remains characteristic of the Italian political scene.

Finally, management of relations with the East will continue to be complicated by institutional deficiencies that more generally concern the entire foreign policy process: the multiplicity and confusion of decision-making centers, an absence of coordination between key minsitries, buraeucratic disputes, etc. In this regard reforms - among which is the already decided reinforcement of the Prime Minsiter's functions - are unavoidable but still quite remote.

5. A case study in decision-making: the Siberian pipeline

First let us briefly recapitulate the facts. Generally, following the coup d'etat in Poland the Italian government aligned itself with the position of the European Community: suspension of lines of credit to Warsaw; denunciation of "Soviet responsibility" but no sanctions against the USSR comparable to those aleady imposed unilaterally by the US. This difference of views from Washington was confirmed by the negative reactions in Italy in the summer of 1982 to the US embargo on European exports to the Soviet Union of "strategic" items incorporating American technology. (This measure affected Nuovo Pignone, a subsidiary of ENI, the state oil company, which produced turbines for the Siberian pipeline on license from General Electric). The Italian government adhered to the diplomatic note of protest by the European Community against the US decision (12 August). Immediately afterwards the individual European governments announced that they would nevertheless abide by their agreements with the USSR. Italy thus showed its endorsement of the prevailing European approach, namely not to jeopardize economic cooperation with the Soviet Union, seen as in the national interest and as a factor for security rather than as a means for policy reprisals or a potential cause of vulnerability to the East.

Turning to concrete policy actions, however, it must be said that in December 1981 the Spadolini cabinet had decided to postpone the political ratification of the agreement between ENI and Soyuzgazexport, which had been more than a year in the negotiation. Faced with direct pressures from Washington and domestic differences over the Siberian pipeline, Italy thus opted, unlike France and Germany, to suspend any decision.

Clearly a compromise solution, the "pause for reflection" was founded on less-than-rigid interpretation; the contracts already signed (such as the one providing for the construction of nineteen pumping stations by Nuovo Pignone) would be honoured, the suspension concerning only future deliveries of natural gas via the pipeline. This dual formula also explains the subsequent course of events: the reaction to the US embargo and also Italy's decision, when the embargo was revoked in November 1982, to continue the "pause", which stayed in effect through 1983. Not until May 1984, more than two years after the signing of the technical agreement between ENI and Soyuzgasexport in January 1982, did the Italian government approve the new gas shipments.

These convoluted developments suggest several hypotheses on Italian decision-making procedures on key aspects of East-West economic relations.

First of all, it is evident that political considerations have tended to outweigh strictly economic calculations in the formulation of the Italian position. It is scarcely plausible that the suspension of the agreement was due to strictly economic factors (Italy's huge balance-of-payments deficit). True enough, from this standpoint the contract eventually agreed (65) proved to be better for Italy than the original 1982 accord, thanks in part to the introduction of price and volume flexibility. Nevertheless the most significant facts point in the opposite direction - the Italian government blocked the negotiations at the end of 1981, when from the technical standpoint Soviet natural gas appeared to be the most advantageous solution (66); and it successfully concluded the contract in 1984 when for a number of reasons (the similar contract now signed with Algeria, the discovery of new reserves in Italy, falling oil prices) its advantages were less pronounced.

Based essentially on a political judgment, the decision to suspend the natural gas agreement highlighted above all Italy's special sensitivity to American pressure. The intent not to jeopardize the exceptionally positive relations Italy was then enjoying with the US clearly influenced the positions adopted both by the foreign ministry and by Prime Minister Spadolini.

Nevertheless, as the disagreements of the summer of 1982 show, Italy was unable to avoid the re-emergence of strains with Washington over the Siberian pipeline. Called upon to act in defense of its own enterprises and to show its solidarity with Europe, the Italian government adhered to the united front of Community protest against the American embargo. In the Italian case as in others, therefore, the question of economic dealings with the East became a structural source of tension with the US. For all Rome's efforts at mediation, a restrictive US stance on exports to Eastern Europe would cause problems for Italian firms, considering their dependence on US technology.

However, domestic political considerations also had a share in determining the "pause for reflection": specifically, differences between the coalition partners on the morrow of the Polish crisis. In December 1981, Socialists and Social Democrats called on the government, in light of events in Warsaw, to reappraise the opportuneness of ratifying ENI's contract; and the oil company was accused in more general terms of excessive liberty of action in matters vital to the national security. This stance was approved by the Liberals, who opposed energy dependence on the Soviet Union. The majority of the DC, however, still backed the agreement. This position was shared by the Communist opposition, which had nonetheless already condemned Soviet interference in Polish affairs. In sustance, the Italian debate on a key question of relations with the Soviet Union shaped up not as a division between government and opposition but as one among the parties of the government coalition itself. And this - which would lead to the compromise solution eventually adopted - is evidence of the apparent modification noted earlier in the traditional relationship in Italy between domestic politics and foreign policy.

Yet one may ask whether what underlay the differences was only, or really, the policy issue of economic relations with Eastern Europe. There is legitimate reason for doubt. For instance, the PSI urged the "pause for reflection" but at the same time declared its opposition to sanctions, criticising if anything excessively soft credits to the USSR. Nor does the debate on the floor of the Senate point to any substantial conflict of views or policy alternatives among the main government parties (67). Rather, there was a resurfacing of differences concerning Italy's overall energy strategy. The nature of the dispute is indicated by the fact that the bloc that opposed ENI's agreeement with Moscow favoured an agreement to buy Algerian natural gas, which ENI felt was too high in price. Once the Algerian contract was signed in 1983, the

opposition to the Siberian gas deal, most particularly Socialist opposition, was withdrawn.

Italian economic policy towards the Soviet Union, in short, was influenced by diverse impulses and interests. The domestic opposition to the Siberian gasline was more influential when it was joined by external pressures deriving from quite another source (sanctions over Poland).

This entanglement of motivations made Italian decision-making fragmentary and inconsistent. First, the division among the coalition parties essentially paralysed the executive and made any decision impossible. Next there was a conflict between ENI - which went ahead with the signature of the technical agreement despite the "pause" - and the government's foreign policy stance. Finally, there were latent clashes between ministries (industry, foreign trade, foreign affairs) so serious as to require the appointment of a joint committee to manage the negotiations, which had been taken out of ENI's hands in an effort at mediation that only helped stall the talks. And in conditions of global political tension between East and West, this stalement marked a broader deteroriation in Italian-Soviet relations between 1981 and 1983.

Of course, the entire Siberian pipeline affair has specific, contingent, and hence transient features. But it is a good enough example of the way in which Italian-Soviet relations may be influenced not just by the overall state of East-West relations and more specifically by American dcisions but also by rivalries within the Italian government coalition.

If the margin for variation in Italian choices in this sphere is set by the broad consensus - in both the political and the economic communities - that cooperation with the USSR is in the national interest, the political management of this cooperation on the Italian side has reflected the influence of a variety of pressures.

APPENDIX: TRENDS OF ECONOMIC RELATIONS WITH USSR

Historically, the management of economic relations with the USSR has always had, from the point of view of Italian governments, various important political motivations. That is, in the sense that development of trade relations has generally been considered the essential means towards an improvement in diplomatic relations. Immediately following World War II, Italy's first trade openings toward the USSR (culminating in the 1948 mission to Moscow of the Repubican La Malfa, who was then the Foreign Trade Minister) reflected - more than the pressure from northern industrial circles which were always interested in resumption of trade - the desire to improve diplomatic relations.

A decisive tendency in this direction was evident mostly after 1960, following Gronchi's trip to Moscow. At that time, however, the largest Italian party defended interests already evident on the part of some sectors of State industry, which were operating their own policy vis-à-vis the Arab world as well as Eastern Europe. Most active in this regard was Enrico Mattei of ENI, l'Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi (National Hydrocarbon), based on competition with American oil groups in a search for new suppliers in these areas. Indeed, it can be said that ENI's strategy had a determining role in the breaking down of barriers, inherited from the Cold War, towards the communist world. In fact, for a few years at least, the Italian open-door policy towards the East was led by Mattei, with guarantees by important sectors of the DC.

Bilateral trade grew steadily in the succeeding decade. During the entire period of detente, especially from 1970 to 1975, Italian governments tended to pursue relations with the USSR through the signing of long-term economic

cooperation agreements. This line remains on the whole valid even during the 1980s, beyond the stalemate caused by the Italian response (the "pause for reflection" on the gas-pipeline, decided by the Spadolini government) to the Polish crisis of December 1981; the data on the 1985-86 exchange confirm Italy's position as Moscow's third trading partner in the West.

Within the evolution of economic relations with the USSR, the determining function of public industry - not only of ENI but also fo IRI (Institute for Industrial Reconstruction) - does not seem destined to change, despite a recent increase in the number of Italian companies present in the Soviet market (almost a thousand in 1985). The two major contracts signed with Soviet entities in recent years are the agreement between SNAM Progetti (ENI) and Sojuzgazexport for the supply of gas to Italy, and the Italimpianti agreement (IRI) for construction fo a pipeline factory in the USSR. This latter contract should assure Italian industry orders worth 2 thousand billion lire (68). If one takes into consideration that the total value of Italian exports to the USSR in 1985 equalled 2,900 billion lire, the influence of public enterprise is quite obvious.

A first conclusion is that interest on the part of leading state industries with regard to the participation in the Soviet market cosntitutes a source of structural pressure, politically very influential, in favour of the development of economic relations with the USSR. Traditionally, it is matter of initiatives linked above all to the Christian Democrats, the links being weaker with lay governing parties, which, however - the Socialist Party in particular - are obtaining new room at the head of public industry (the naming of Reviglio as President of ENI). The Communist Party, for various reasons (its influence in economic bodies such as cooperatives which are interested in relations with the Soviet Union, support of employment initiatives, etc.) backs economic openings to the USSR, a strategy which enjoys a notable degree of internal political consensus.

Even segments of private industry, moreover, are interested in the Soviet market. The most notable case is FIAT, present in the USSR since the '20s and protagonist, in 1966, of the first important agreement between a Western enterprise and the Soviet regime: construction of the auto works at Togliattigrad. The Turin firm - which signed new cooperation agreements with the USSR in 1984-85, and which already has an annual turnover with the Soviet Union of between 100 and 200 billion dollars (69) - follows its own strategy of expansion toward the East based mainly on industrial cooperation in the machine tools and motor sectors. Other private groups have expanded (Montedison, Olivetti) or are initiating relations of considerable volume with the Soviet Union in new areas (Danieli, Cogolo, Fata).

It is important to note that Italian entrepreneurs are opposed (their official organisation, "Confindustria", has explicitly said so) to economic sanctions due to political reasons (70).

As a whole, the, Italian big business looks with interest at the development of trade with the USSR, today still considered inferior to the promise of existing possibilities due to obtacles of varying nature. (Less evident but increasing is the pressure of small industry which has long been on the periphery of contacts with the USSR, though operating as subcontractors on agreements signed by the large companies). Quantitatively, in fact, the value of the Italo-Soviet exchange appears rather modest: in 1985, Italian imports from the USSR (5,600 billion lire) represented approximately 3% of the total Italian imports, while exports did not reach 2% of the national total.

Nevertheless, the specific structure of Italo-Soviet trade seems to indicate that relations with the USSR have for Italy greater importance than the figures would reveal; a structure which, in its simplified form, is based on imports of energy (80% of Italian imports from the USSR are hydrocarbons) and on Italian exports in two central sectors: iron and steel products, which in 1985 have already constituted more than 30% of Italian exports; industrial plants and machinery.

From a strictly economic standpoint, then, Italy's interest in relations with the USSR is tied to three factors: the complementary of the economies; the importance of the USSR as a supplier, mostly considered safe and convenient, of energy sources; and the importance of the Soviet market as an outlet for a large part of Italian heavy industry, beset by recession.

Recent trends in Italian-Soviet trade are inconsistent. On the one hand Italy's trade deficit with the USSR, which peaked at 4 trillion lire in 1984, has declined sharply, to 2.7 trillion lire in 1985 and 900 billion for the first trhree quarters of 1986. The improvement, however, is not due to increased exports to the Soviet Union (whose share of total Italian exports shrank to 1.5 per cent in January-September 1986). It is simply the result of the sharp contraction - in value - of Soviet gas and oil exports to Italy in the wake of the plummeting world oil and energy prices. On the other hand major agreements and contracts have been discussed and signed, including those mentioned above, which should generate an expansion of Italian-Soviet trade by the end of the decade.

An assessment of the policy implications of these trends must turn on two essential points. First, Italy's energy dependence on the Soviet Union will not increase significantly from today's levels. In 1990 Soviet natural gas will supply 29 per cent of Italian requirements as against 25 per cent this year, while Soviet supplies will cover less than 5 per cent of total Italian energy requirements. Second, some constraints - underscored by the massive Italian trade deficits of past years - will continue to limit the potential for bilateral trade.

Consequently, if some extension of Italian economic interests with the USSR is likely, it will not be pronounced enough to imply any substantial change in the domestic incentives for cooperation with the Soviet Union.

Italian trade with the USSR (January-June)
(billions of lire)

	1983	1984	1985	1986
Italian exports	1,406	1,268	1,372	1,130
Italian imports	2,836	3,124	2,418	1,805
Balance	-980	-1,855	-1,045	-647

Source: Istat

REFERENCES

1. For a complete history see J. Barth Urban, Moscow and the Italian Communist Party, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1986

2. See P. Spriano, Le riflessioni dei comunisti italiani sulle società dell'Est e il socialismo reale, Studi storici, n. 1, 1982

3. See R. Putnam, Italian Foreign Policy: the Emergent Consensus, in H.R. Penniman (ed.), Italy at the Polls: the Parliamentary Elections of 1976, Washington, American Enterprise Institute, 1976

4. L'Unita, March 15, 1975

5. Il Corriere della Sera, June 15, 1976

6. See Berlinguer in L'Unità, June 15, 1976, pp. 1 and 18

7. See the Report by R. Ledda in L'Unità, October 6, 1981

8. On public controversy between PCI and CPSU see P. Bufalini, Euromissili. Polonia e la nostra discussione con il PCUS, Roma, 1982 (with documentary Appendix)

9. See Natta's interview in l'Unità, February 9, 1986, p. Q

10. See the debate published by Rinascita since the issue 43, November 8, 1986

11. Published in l'Espresso, January 23, 1982; in Il Sole-24 Ore, June 15, 1983 and in l'Unità, January 15, 1987

12. The text was published by l'Unità, November 16, 1986, p. 10

13. See Napolitano's interview in Corriere della Sera, November 2, 1986

14. G. Pasquino, The Italian Christian Democrats, in R. Morgan, S. Silvestri (eds), Moderates and Conservatives in Western Eruope, London, Heinemann, 1982

15. Cfr. G. Formigoni, La sinistra cattolica e il Patto atlantico, Il Politico, No. 4, 1985

16. E. Di Nolfo, Problemi della politica estera italiana: 1943-50, Storia e Politica, I e II, 1975, pp. 306-309

17. L. Garruccio, I 30 anni della NATO. Un'ipotesi senza alternative, Politica Internazionale, nn. 5-6, 1979

18. R. Morozzo della Rocca, La politica estera italiana e l'Unione Sovietica (1944-1948), Roma, La Goliardica, pp. 304 sgg.

19. A. Sterpellone, Vent'anni di politica estera, in Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), La politica estera della Repubblica italiana, a cura di M. Bonanni, Roma, Comunità, 1967, pp. 337-340

20. See the Report by De Mita in Il Popolo, May 27, 1986, pp. 8-10

21. See the leading article by P. Cabras in Il Popolo, December 27, 1986

22. See in particular the positive comments on Sacharov's return to Moscow in La Repubblica, December 20, 1986, p. 7

23. See the essay by H. Stehle in Europa Archiv, n. 17, 1967 ("New Features of Vatican Ostpolitik")

24. During his visit in Rome (January 1987), Gen. Jaruzelski allegedly proposed to the Pope the opening of diplomatic relationships between the Vatican and Poland, a proposal that was rebutted.

25. A. Benzoni-V. Tedesco, Il movimento socialista nel dopoguerra, Padova, Marsilio, 1968

26. See G. Tamburrano, Pietro Nenni, Bari, Laterza, 1986, p. 283 for a comment on the articles published by Nenni by Mondo Operaio

27. A. Benzoni-V. Tedesco, Il Movimento, cit. pp. 126-129

28. This stance remained valid also during the two years ('67-'69) of the reunification between PSI and PSDI.

29. P. Nenni, I conti con la storia. Diari 1967-71, Milano, Sugarco, 1983, pp. 213-14

30. See in particular the issue of August-September 1986, which contains, among others, an essay by A. Wohlstetter

31. J. La Palombara, Socialistes Alternatives: the Italian Variant, Foreign Affairs, spring 1982, p. 938

32. V. Spini, La politica estera dell'Italia, Critica Sociale, n. 10, 1986, pp. 25-28

33. Tesi del PSI per il 43° Congresso (May 11-15, 1984), il Compagno, Quaderni di politica, n. 5

34. See the leading article by Craxi in l'Avanti!, October 11, 1986

35. I will examine only PRI's positins, for the reasons that its governmental functions are more relevant. The Liberal Party (PLI), anyhow, shares many of these positions.

36. A. Benzoni, Le scelte internazionali del PRI, Politica Internazionale, n. 22, 1986

37. Ibide

38. Typical of this shift is the reportage on the "New Russia" published by the weekly Europeo, January 24, 1987

39. Politica Internazionale, (leading article), nn.3-4, 1985

40. I am referring to the polls made by the Louis Harris and examined by the Atlantic Institute. These polls were published in Italy by the daily Il Sole-24 Ore. Other opinion polls were published by the weekly Espresso.

41. See Badoglio's letter to Stalin (August 1944) in MAE, Italia-URSS. Pagine di storia 1917-1984, Roma, 1985, pp. 66-68

42. R. Morozzo della Rocca, La politica estera, cit. infra.

43. E. Di Nolfo, Problemi, cit. pp. 295-96

44. On the problem, see A. Sterpellone, Vent'anni, cit. pp. 185 sgg

45. The text is in MAE, Italia-URSS, cit. pp. 76-80

46. M. Brosio, Diari di Mosca, 1947-51, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1986

47. The already mentioned collection of documents (Italia-URSS) has been edited jointly by the Minister of Affairs of the two countries.

48. See the text in Italia-URSS, cit., pp. 87-88

49. N.K. Arbatova, Vnesnajaja politika Italii, Moskva, 1984, p. 98

50. See the text in Italia-USSR, cit. pp. 137-38

51. On these various inclinations, see S. Silvestri, The Italian Paradox: Consensus Amid Instability, in G. Flynn (ed.), The Internal Fabric of Western Security, London, Croom Helm, pp 129-152

52. Il Popolo, 28 settembre 1983

53. My source is discussion with Italian diplomats involved in the CSCE

54. La Repubblica, January 13, 1987, p. 3

55. An analysis of the two motions and of their consequences on the decision-making process has been done by A. Manzella, Il processo decisionale nella politica estera italiana, Quaderni costituzionali, n. 3 1984, pp. 477 sgg (with documents added)

56. M. Cremasco, The Political Debate on the Deployment of Euromissiles: The Italian Case, The International Spectator, n. 2, 1984,; M. De Andreis, The Nuclear Debate in Italy, Survival, May-June 1986

57. Camera dei Deputati, servizio studi, Dibattito Parlamentare su Euromissile e BN (Oct. 79-Feb. 81)

58. See the speech by Craxi in l'Avanti!, November 17, 1981, pp; 1-2

59. See in particular Emilio Colombo's speech at Georgetown University (February 1982) in Relazioni Internazionali, March 6, 1982. The Minister of Foreign Affairs in Spadolini's cabinet suggested the conclusion of a formal "friendship agreement" between Europe and USA on East-West and North-South issues.

60. See the study by the Istituto Affari Internazionali in IAI, L'Italia nella Politica Internazioanle 1983-84, Milano, Franco Angeli, 1986

61. See the platform of the 1st Craxi government (August 1983) in Relazioni Internazionali, nn. 33-34, 1983, p. 1126

62. See the platform of the second Craxi government (August 1986) in Politica Internazionale, nn. 8-9, 1986, pp. 3-4

63. From the Soviet standpoint, relations with Italy are judged a "model". See U. Korelov, Sovetsko-Italjanski Otnoscenij, Mezdunarodnaji Zisn, 1, 1986. For a comment see F. Soglian, La Ostpolitik italiana e il nuovo corso sovietico, Politica Internazionale, n. 11, 1986

64. For example, Andreotti's declaration on permenent division of the two German states was rectified by Craxi with an official letter of excuse to Kohl. See on this point and more generally on Italian Ostpolitik the introduction by R. Aliboni to IAI, L'Italia, cit. 1984, Milano, Franco Angeli, 1986

65. The contract, valid for 25 years, provides for Soviet supplies of natural gas to Italy in flexible annual quotas (from a minimum of 4.6 billion m3 to a maximum of 5.5 till 1992). The price (on average 3.6 $ for Btu) is estimated according to a particular "formula", which takes into account the average cost of national energy consumption.

66. The arguments advanced by experts in favour of the agreement with USSR were advantageous prices; relative low dependence of Italy on Soviet supplies; diversification of energy sources

67. Atti Parlamentari, Senato, Resoconti Stenografici, January 19, 1982

68. This contract, signed in September 1985, provides for the construction of a steel plant at Volskij. It is a ready for operation agreement. See Il Sole-24 Ore, Sept 16, 1985

69. On the new negotiations between Fiat and USSR see "Presto un accordo Fiat-URSS per una nuova Togliattigrad", La Repubblica, Dec 17, 1985

70. See the declaration by Lucchini (President of Confindustria) to Novosti, Oct 12, 1984. According to this declaration, Confindustria would have tried to influence the Government to put an end to the "pause for reflection".