

**DOCUMENTI
IAI**

REGIONAL REASSERTION: THE DILEMMAS OF ITALY

by Gianni Bonvicini

IAI9451

ISTITUTO AFFARI INTERNAZIONALI

REGIONAL REASSERTION: THE DILEMMAS OF ITALY

by Gianni Bonvicini

1. Italy's domestic crises and the effect on its foreign policy role

Before analysing Italian assumptions and interests in the European Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP, previously named EPC) it is essential to address the issue of the country's present deep political transformation. Italy represents an important example of a radical renewal in domestic politics after the end of the Cold War (the other example being Germany). (1)

A new electoral law, more in line with the ones in use in other west European countries, has been approved; the old, corrupt, political class has collapsed, as a result of the operation "clean hands" judicial action and of popular referendums to change the electoral rules; new political forces have emerged, this fact having been confirmed by anticipated general election of 27th March 1994; a new government, headed by Silvio Berlusconi, a mass media entrepreneur, for the first time after the second world war has opened the doors to a declared rightist political party, Alleanza Nazionale (whose core is the MSI, the old fascist party); and finally a process of constitutional adaptation, aiming to create a kind of federal state along traditional European models (more power to the Prime Minister or President, counterbalanced by greater autonomy to the Regions; a clearer division of competencies and roles between the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, like the one existing between the Bundestag and Bundesrat) will most probably continue.

This has created, from one side, high political expectation of internal deep change, from the other side, a considerable degree of political confusion in the country, aggravated by a difficult and ambiguous economic performance, except for those export-oriented sectors which took profit (at least in the short term) out of the devaluation of the lira; unemployment is giving no sign, as promised by the new government during the electoral campaign, of relaxation after one of the longest period of economic recession experimented by the country; the new elections have not led towards the expected bipolar party system, on the contrary, the old fashion pattern of coalition of parties with different political strategies and ideologies is weakening the potential for new and more efficient governing methods: in fact, some political forces are undermining national unity (the Lega), others recall nationalistic and state oriented traditions, along a neofascist vision of political life (Alleanza Nazionale); and finally, Berlusconi's political movement, Forza Italia (not yet transformed into a proper political party), expresses a wish for efficient management of the state and for its progressive "privatisation", which hardly coincides with the political priorities of its government's partners.

In this new domestic context, Italy's international relations are characterised by both continuity and change. Among international factors clearly we refer to those changes like the demise of political and strategic bipolarism and the growing number of local and regional conflicts not just outside Europe but right in the core of the Old Continent. Traditional multilateralism is facing growing problems, exacerbated by the deep and longlasting international, especially European, economic crisis. It is within the context of this European and international crisis that the Italian crises is to be framed. Throughout the Eighties and still in 1991 and the first half of 1992 (just

before the first monetary crisis) Italy seemed eager to take up new international responsibilities and has played a significant role in relaunching the European-integration issue. Yet, instead of a "virtuous" circle", we have witnessed the starting of a "vicious circle" in its place. The Italian crises, mostly determined by internal causes, has been thus worsened by the international crises. The weakening of international relations at any level, from Nato to Europe of Maastricht, has boosted Italy's deficiencies and abnormalities. The stiff macroeconomic standards envisaged by the Maastricht Treaty have highlighted Italy's long-standing troubles in its economic policy, swollen bureaucracy and the political governing system itself. The repeated ERM crises have underlined the flaws of a domestic economic policy based only on the monetary level. Moreover, the ideological collapse in Eastern Europe has deprived Italy's political institutional system of its connecting glue. Until recently, in fact, its politico-institutional system was based on a pact excluding the opposition (for ideological reasons), a "conventio ad excludendum", accompanied by consensual management of public affairs and through the dominance of the legislative (where the opposition held around the half of the Presidencies of parliamentary Committees) over the executive. But one very positive feature of the old "conventio" was the one which allowed Italy to pursue a consensual foreign policy which was reaping increasing national consensus. Today with a potential regime of alternation in government, this consensus has to be ensured either by working out what the Americans define as a "bipartisan" foreign policy or by ensuring the necessary continuity on the constitutional and administrative levels (like in Germany or France). (2)

In this extremely volatile situation, both at an international and domestic level as well in their mutual relations, Italy runs the risk of playing an increasingly marginal role. In fact, the above mentioned domestic factors have negatively affected Italy's foreign relations as ongoing internal political, economic and institutional crises have led to the deterioration of Italy's credibility and image abroad, in a first time among the financial community, due to the weakness of the lira and the appearance of an economic structural crises, but more recently also among the European and American political elites for Berlusconi's decision to embark into the government the neofascist party, an initiative which could distance Italy from its traditional European and transatlantic Alliances.

These changing *domestic and international* situation is somewhat contrasted by the continuity of the institutional and multilateral fora to which Italy participates. Although they were created in the context of the bipolar balance, they have not collapsed along with it. There may be uncertainty about the future role of Nato or of the policy that European Union has to adopt towards the new requests for enlargement or about the effectiveness of WEU in the managing of some military aspects of the Bosnian conflict, but participation in these institutions has not been put into question and they still constitute a stable point of reference for their member states.

In any case it is rather evident that Italy's role in these institutions has diminished: it has become a less essential ally in Nato, *with the paradoxical result of being used as a forward bases for Nato air strikes over Bosnia and at the same time excluded from the Contact Group which should decide the policies for the solution of the conflict in former Yugoslavia*; its ability to meet the macroeconomic criteria for Economic and Monetary Union is uncertain, *as demonstrated by provocative proposals, like that of the German Christian Democrats on a political-economic hard core inside the Union, which openly doesn't include Italy (3)*; its presence in the G-7 is not crucial, *this question being unofficially raised when discussions about the enlargement of the Summit to*

Russia (and in the future to China) started, with the unconfessed idea of letting the Summit coincide with a revised (Germany and Japan as new members) UN Security Council (4); a way of reasoning which is reconfirmed by Italy's status inside the United Nations where it is not substantially equal to that of other national actors, namely Germany and Japan, which are, as just said, among the candidates to the future Security Council; and once again, with Italy fully engaged in UN peacekeeping operations, something that costs both in terms of financing and in terms of casualties. This does not mean that Italy has lost its ability to influence or act; it merely implies that it must carefully reassess its position.

For several years, Italy has enjoyed a condition of geopolitical privilege under the American protectorate and as an active member of the *European Community*. NATO has granted external security and Europe a comfortable internal and international development of country's presence. The end of the bipolar world leaves Italy a greater room for autonomous responsibility. And the solution of the present economic and political crises *could, at least in theory*, help to define the status of Italy among nations. Nino Andreatta, the former foreign affairs minister, had stated that "The end of the Cold War has not caused a revision of the basic choices: Italy's membership in the EU and the Atlantic Alliance. It has implied, however, the end of *privilege of position* and free riding. Membership is no longer enough in the new international conditions: one has to qualify oneself through presence and hard work". (5)

But, on the other side, the crisis of the Italian political and institutional system comes at a time when Italy is increasingly becoming a front line actor (think to the Balkans and the Mediterranean) in the new European environment; consequently, *this condition of political and institutional transition* contributes to ambiguity and a lack of transparency in the management and definition of Italian foreign policy in several ways.

In the first place it must be admitted that the seriousness of domestic problems turns attention away from foreign policy issues; the political debate on foreign policy choices is practically non-existent and this in the long run is going to produce confusion and, may be, a reversal in the list of Italian priorities; *apparently foreign policy questions are just matter for the government and more particularly for its foreign affairs minister (his colleagues and the prime minister himself focusing exclusively on domestic interests); in fact the new political forces, which gave birth after general elections of March 1994 to the first government of the so called "Second Republic", didn't carry out a real effort for specifying their international interests and have made only a few generic statements, except for some few specific issues like, as we will see below, the quarrel with Slovenia or the negative reaction on the above mentioned CDU's proposal of a core Europe without italian participation; and even those few declarations are contradictory and somewhat distant from the reality of the effective italian international behaviour. Reporting on the Italian debate about its participation to the EU or, more generally, on its international attitudes is therefore an exercise that cannot be based on continuity, in terms of clarity of political attitudes. It is more the outcome of reactive and occasional actions on individual political episodes, than the result of strategic thinking at either the government or party level.* (6)

In fact, despite the lack of attention to foreign policy, Italy has continued with its international engagements, and its military participation abroad, under UN cover, is comparable, *as just said*, to that of its major european partners. But this armed presence in various crisis spots is not a source of comprehensive domestic debate, nor a means of getting advantages in terms of a credible

authority and prestige abroad; also under this aspect, Italy remains a marginal international actor.

A crisis at Italy's borders, in the Balkans, has transformed the country, for the first time in many years, into a front line actor in a period in which, *from the multilateral side, Nato and the CFSP are showing their limits in terms of decisional power, and, from the domestic side, a new national defence policy has not yet emerged.* The combination of these two weaknesses is heavily affecting confidence in the traditional pattern of our foreign and security policy.

More generally, in order to sort out of a certain status of confusion, the *new* government will have to reassess the country's international engagements and priorities. But this can be done only through an analysis and evaluation of the tendencies which have emerged in the last years in the practical conduct of our foreign policy with regard both to our involvement in multilateral decision-making (particularly the CFSP) and to the country's basic international interests (US, former Yugoslavia, the Mediterranean, etc.). (7)

2. The positive outcome of Italian participation to the European foreign and security policy initiatives

Starting from the multilateral decision-making aspects of our international role, the most obvious point of reference for Italian foreign action continues to remain our intense participation to CFSP, old and new. We recall here that it was not by chance that the old title of our chapter on the first Hill's book about EPC and National Foreign Policies, written at the beginning of the Eighties, was: "Italy an integrationist perspective". (8)

It is useful to sum up which had been the main reasons for a full and convinced support given by Italy, from the very beginning to the present days, to the progressive reinforcement of the European foreign (and, later on, security) policy.

Since 1945, there was a kind of "natural" reflex in our foreign policy concept that pushed Italy to favour multilateral initiatives at the expense of purely bilateral approaches. From the outset, Italy's participation to EPC was then considered as the "optimum case" for underlining our traditional political line favourable to the development of the multilateralisation of country's international activities on the basis of the original post-war choices to fully participate into the Community and Nato.

That was not just the outcome of a post-war new "philosophy", but also a very practical means able to provide a stable incentive to a bipartisan attitude of political forces (including the communists as major opposition party) on foreign policy issues under a common multilateral, and in this case, European "umbrella". Clearly multilateral choices and positions helped to avoid radical political confrontation on ad hoc international events (especially in neighbouring areas like the Middle East), that could have hampered domestic political climate.

In addition to that, one has also to consider the great advantage for our national diplomacy, which also in its bilateral activities took profit out of the so called "cover function" played by EPC in troublesome regions and towards those countries which posed a threat to the West as a whole and where the limits of a pure bilateral (or national) policy appeared rather evident. Typical, under this

point of view, was our policy line towards the PLO, a very sensitive domestic political problem. Even those politicians (among others Giulio Andreotti, when foreign minister) who had been traditionally considered very close to PLO's positions had carefully avoided to break the European solidarity, especially in those years in which the peace process between Palestinians and Israelis appeared to be in progress. European discipline, in fact, was considered too important to protect both our own national interest and the peace settlement. (9)

These two first considerations, which will be reinforced by the next one on our traditional pro-European attitude, help to understand why Italy acted, practically along the entire history of EPC, as a disciplined member, giving always priority to the common interests (except in very few and exceptional cases, like the second phase of the Falkland crisis, May 1982, when the Italian government withdrew from the sanctions against Argentina). Compared with other members of the Union our performance as "good boy" was to be graded at the highest level. And this happened to be in a field where the basic rule was traditionally intergovernmental and therefore possibilities of letting national preferences prevail rather tempting.

This has to do, as just mentioned, also with a point of doctrine. That of working to the establishment of a more consistent process of European integration through the idea of adding a political dimension to the already existing functional process in the economic field. The enlargement of the area of common competencies to the foreign policy field was therefore seen as an essential element on the way to the strengthening of the supranational character of the Community (Union). This "ideological" attitude explains the reasons why Italy always pressed (or at least supported) for a progressive movement of the cooperative method and decision-making structure of EPC towards that of the Community. Italy was in fact asking in several occasions (among others with the original version of the Genscher-Colombo plan) (10) to "communitarise" the decision-making procedures of EPC and, possibly, in the future also those in the security field; at the same time to move towards more stable and "common" institutional mechanisms, like the Secretariat (first, directed by an Italian diplomat, Giovanni Iannuzzi) at the time of negotiations on the Single European Act (1985), in addition to the intergovernmental ones. Partially, as we will see further on, our diplomacy worked to help creating the conditions for adding a security dimension to EPC, again through the Genscher-Colombo initiative in a first stage and the relaunching of WEU later on in 1984. The same positive attitude towards the reinforcement of the security dimension was evident during the drafting of WEU Common Platform (1987). More in general, in the Eighties, Italy's attitude followed strictly the traditional path of giving priority to those elements which could underline the "communitarisation" of common actions and policies. Typical, under this point of view, was the recourse for the first time inside the European Council to majority voting, under art. 236, on the proposal of the Italian chairman Craxi to organise an intergovernmental conference for the revision of the Rome Treaty (Milan, June 1985): the main contentious point being the Franco-German plan for a Treaty on European Union, with an important aspect of common foreign and security policy. (11)

Finally, through a convinced participation to EPC's substantial activities, Italy tried to reinforce the international credibility of its foreign policy and the functioning of our diplomatic mechanisms and exploited indirectly this reinforcement in order to be recognised as one of the main international actors in world affairs, from the Group of Seven to the many engagements in troublesome spots around in the world under the UN umbrella. Paradoxically the positive record of our participation, as a recognised and essential actor, to EPC and, more generally, to the wider

international stage has helped to enlarge our range of action and to reinforce our national interests. This potential, as we are going to describe, started to be exercised already before 1989, but it developed further in the post-89 new european and world environment. Italy's international activism ranged from the naval participation in the first Gulf crisis (1987) to the Irak war (1991), from Somalia (1992) to Mozambique (1993), from the patrolling of the Adriatic (1993) to the offer of its basis to Nato for air strikes on Bosnia (1994). In general, the Country has tried to maintain what was called "an emerging profile" of its foreign policy, which started to appear back at the beginning of the Eighties trough the first important decision to deploy Euromissiles (1981). (12)

3. The emergence of the new Europe and the italian attempt to adopt a more independent and imaginative foreign policy

In the new geostrategic situation of post-1989 world, Italy perceived rather immediately an important change in its international position: the country, as we have just said, is less essential for the traditional alliances and duties, but at the same time even more "front-line" placed than before. As a consequence Italy, in these first years of the post cold war period, lives the ambivalent perception of having more room for manoeuvre and of being less important. This perception, still rather unclear at conceptual and political level, is today going to originate different domestic political reactions due to the perverse combination of what it was used to be named the "dual crises", internal to Italy and international at the same time.

In any case in the first period, between '89 and the end of '92, italian activism in international politics succeeded to overtake also our traditional partners, as new projects emerged among italian foreign policies priorities, like, among others, the Central European Initiative (CEI), launched like "Quadrangolare" in 1989; the so called CSCM for securing stability in the Mediterranean, an adapted version of the old CSCE for the Southern Region (1990); a new attention to the Maghreb (the FIVE plus FIVE initiative, (1990); and more recently, in 1994 a proposal for the reforming of the Security Council. One of the characteristic of those plans was that of having been elaborated outside the framework of EPC, a rather unusual step from the side of our diplomacy. This created a certain nervous reactions among our partners (e.g. the Germans and even the European Commission were disturbed by the CEI, which was considered an element of confusion on the way to a new policy of the Community towards the Central and Eastern European Countries (13)) and the need of regaining their confidence trough the assurance of the strict linkage between our own initiatives and the foreign and security positions of the Union.

The attempt to attribute a more active and less traditional role to Italy can be seen also with respect to some european initiatives, like the support given to the british point of view, trough the so called British-Italian Declaration, as opposed to the German-French "entente". This proposal about the future of european security policy was released at the end of 1991, just at the eve of the Maastricht European Council, and its aim was that of emphasising the nature of WEU as a pillar inside the Atlantic Alliance, in contrast with the franco-german orientation to link it definitely to the EU; this move was seen as a break in the usual italian preference given to Germany or to the Franco-German entente. Italy in that case tried to play the role of mediator between the extreme positions of France and Germany, on one hand, and Great Britain, on the other, with regard to the future of European Defence and its relationship with NATO. Italy, like Great Britain, was particularly

concerned with a US negative reaction on a plan which wanted to attribute to WEU a strong autonomous role; in addition, Italy had some reservations on the idea of considering the Franco-German Brigade (today Eurocorp), from which it was originally excluded, as the future military nucleus of WEU. (14)

In fact, Italy was rather reluctant also to accept franco-german offer to become part of the Brigade. Again here our diplomacy didn't accept the idea of being offered only a second rank membership on an initiative which was considered too much bilateral and in contrast with our traditional engagements in the euro-atlantic collective security network. In fact, a great deal of italian suspicion towards the Franco-German Brigade had to do with our traditional reluctance to isolate the US from the European defence scenario. But this line didn't resist for a long time and it developed into a full support of the "spirit" of Maastricht on the CFSP, that is along the french-german interpretation.

And, more recently, Italy has witnessed a progressive transition towards a greater emphasis of a more autonomous European contribution within NATO. During the last Atlantic Council of January 1994, former President Aurelio Ciampi underlined the need to rebalance the responsibilities between Europe and the US in the European theatre (15). The Bosnian case and, most probably, the bad experience in Somalia under US leadership may have convinced Italy about the appropriateness of a different share of responsibilities with the US. In short, Italy has fully aligned itself with the front of those in favour of giving Europe a different weight within NATO and the possibility of acting autonomously in presence of a US decision to stay out of certain actions. Italy is still absent from the Eurocorp, but this is likely to be for a short time and for reasons which have nothing to do with the US attitude on the old Franco-German initiative.

As far as the euroamerican relations is concerned, the former Italian government, and particularly its foreign minister Nino Andreatta, developed the idea of a full reconsideration of Transatlantic links and expressed themselves in favour of a new pact between Europe and the US, the so called "Transatlantic Chart Two", a deep revision of Baker's original Chart, which should have addressed the whole range of relations between the two parties, including the economic and political dimensions. The idea was that of creating preventive mechanisms and more stringent rules in order to avoid open conflicts between the two parts. This proposal, which never became an official request of the Italian government, reflects concern about a possible American retaliation against restrictive attitudes of some European countries, as has been the case during the final stage of Gatt negotiation. (16)

Another sign of the new foreign policy assertiveness of Italy was the growing presence in multilateral military operations in out-of-area regions and the offer of troops for UN peacekeeping activities. Again here we tended to move, at least partially, outside the context of a strict european coordination and domestic considerations dictated in several cases our behaviour, as it clearly appeared in the Somalia case. Our active role in UN peacekeeping operations gave birth, as we have said above, to a debate on the reforming of UN Security Council and on the italian presence in it. Berlusconi's government has officially adopted an old proposal of the former foreign minister, Nino Andreatta, on the creation of semi-permanent members status inside the Security Council, based on objective criteria, like economic factors, human resources, culture and mass media communications. (17)

More in general, while maintaining a traditional pro european attitude, Italy seemed to take a more

independent role from the emergence of a completely new international environment. Three key issues, like the Somalia, Former Yugoslavia and Mediterranean cases, will better illustrate this new tendency.

4. Towards a more assertive Italian role in foreign and security policy

A. Italy acting alone: a bad case, the Somalia experience

As it is well remembered, the original goal of the mission "Restore Hope" was to ensure the distribution of humanitarian aid to the Somalia population. The development of new and unclear goals highlighted the different national perceptions about how to deal with crisis-management. Moreover it offered a chance to rethink the role of the UN and that of individual countries in peace-keeping and peace-enforcing. The participation of Italian troops in the UN contingent in Somalia (UNOSOM), which was originally composed only of US military troops, was not initially welcomed by the US because of the Italian historical and political involvement in the country and, especially, it was not the result of a common European decision but of a purely national interest.

In addition, the case of General Bruno Loi, the first Italian commander in Somalia, who did not want to take orders from the UN that conflicted with the Italian perception of the aim of the peace mission raised several delicate questions like the role of the single members of the UN and of who should exercise authority over the military troops; and the frequent subordination of UN troops to the US military position.

In Somalia, the US has demonstrated how difficult it is for a leading country not to be in a commanding position. This has added to the contradiction between national interests and the management of collective interests. Faced with the difficulties associated with this ambiguous US role and an unclear mission, the UN proved unable to set up an efficient chain of command and could find no better way out than to put the blame on the Italians. The latter, who had largely justified misgivings about the US approach and UN confusion, were unable to get their views through the decision making mechanism and gave in to the old Italian temptation of attempting unsolicited mediation. Our complaints didn't find a quick and full support from the other member of the Union present in Somalia nor from the CFSP organs. Italy remained completely isolated and it had to bear a contrast bilaterally not just with its traditional ally, the US, but also for the very first time with a multilateral institution like the UN. The Italian and foreign press defined the tensions between Italy, the US and the United Nations over the intervention in Somalia as "the conflict between Rambo and Machiavelli".

An assessment of what has happened should help to avoid the repetition of such an unpleasant situation, in which the Italian participation in peacekeeping received little reward. More generally, the Somalia case has highlighted relations between the international institutions and national responsibility. In particular what has not been clarified is the transfer of sovereignty to international institutions in the management of peace keeping operations.

In the case of Somalia, Italy has tried to raise the question of the role of international institutions vs national responsibility, but finally it decided to adopt a national behaviour, also because nobody fully supported its point of view. The collapse of a multilateral approach has thus led to the temptation of affirming national interests as a priority in the participation of a multinational

initiative; old fashioned concepts like "geopolitical approach" and "spheres of influence" were almost adopted by Italian press and scholars in the case of Somalia (18). Europe remained an abstract actor with no influence at all on our domestic debate and international behaviour.

B. Italy and Former Yugoslavia: more Europe is needed

Also in this area, it is now felt that there is a need to reassess the Italian policy towards the Balkans on the basis of a clear definition of national interests at stake. But in general our behaviour has always been that of giving full support to collective efforts, being Italy ready to accept any request of contribution to the settlement of the conflict.

As a consequence, although the Italian government has always been very reluctant to consider military intervention in the absence of a global political agreement among the parties at war, Italy repeatedly manifested its willingness to participate in humanitarian or peacekeeping missions. In the autumn of 1991, Italy was ready to participate in the FORPRONU in Croatia with a force of 3000 men and one year later an Italian contingent of 1300 men was ready to be sent to Bosnia for a UN humanitarian mission.

In both cases, a veto from the Serbs kept these plans from being realized. Moreover, the UN continued to rule out the participation in military missions of countries bordering on the crisis area. Former foreign minister Nino Andreatta declared that Italy was ready, should the UN request it, to participate in operations in Bosnia aimed at implementing a peace plan agreed on by the parties, and this still remains the general tendency among the new political forces. Moreover, it must be remembered that Italy made its most important contribution in the field of logistics, by offering use of its airbases to Nato's various missions, including the bombing of the Serbs in Bosnia.

Italy's progressive transformation into a "propulsive platform" for intervention in the former Yugoslavia naturally poses a number of problems. The Italian government insists that each operation departing from Italian soil must have UN coverage and that it must be informed in detail of the plans of every mission to be carried out. Although Italian troops are not deployed on Yugoslav territory, Italy is providing a significant contribution to the implementation of the new measures adopted by international organizations and therefore finds itself in a front line position. Moreover, as it borders on the former Yugoslavia, Italy will have to find a modus vivendi with all the successor states. (19)

This explains Italy's difficult position in light of Washington's oscillations--first the US reluctance to enter the Yugoslav conflict, second the opposite US attitude to launch the "Lift and strike" military action by air and not with a parallel engagement on the ground. Italy also had reservations about Christopher's opposition to the European "Safe areas" plan.

In the Yugoslav case, although Italian national interests are rather evident, Italy has normally supported the positions of its European partners avoiding any prevalence of national behaviour; but at the same time it has expressed its frustration to the limited European role and to the "failure" of CFSP. In other words, more Europe is needed in order to prevent new pressure for nationalistic policies towards former Yugoslavia and again here the low profile of the European role is not helping to overcome nationalistic pressures in our country. The risk is that of leaving too much room of manoeuvre to those political forces of the extreme right, now present in the government,

which would like to transform this sense of disappointment into a national issue, by reopening, as they did first during the electoral campaign and then at government level, the question of our eastern borders with Slovenia and Croatia (20). Particularly with Slovenia the national issue has moved into the forefront. Under the pressure of Alleanza Nazionale, and of its more radical and nostalgic core, the old but still alive fascist MSI, the new government has reversed the old strategy of keeping the contentious elements low and has loudly declared that the solution of bilateral questions had to be considered a precondition to the opening of negotiations between the European Union and Slovenia. An attitude like this, so far from the traditional Italian habit to privilege multilateral interests on purely bilateral concerns has raised a lot of surprised, to say the less, reactions from the side of our European partners. But again this case represents an other important sign of the changing Italian behaviour in foreign policy.

C. Italy's Southern European Role

Italian role into the Mediterranean has always been a conflicting issue both at domestic and European level. Post-war Italian official policy was that of linking firmly the country to Europe and playing in it the "Mediterranean" part. The priority, in any case, was given to Europe or to use a famous Gianni Agnelli's slogan "to watch over the Alps". But some political parties and especially fractions of the old Christian-democrats and communists did try in several occasions to bring the attention of the government towards the Mediterranean Basin, which had to be considered a vital national interest. Therefore, it must be said that these few attempts remained rather marginal with respect of our focus on the building of a strong European Union and to our full participation to NATO and the defence of Europe from the Eastern threat. This pro-European attitude was considered by our Northern partners as a good guarantee from possible temptations to act nationally, like other Southern European EU members, namely France.

Now, with new post cold war scenario the situation has changed, and this time the concern is expressed from the Italian side towards the Mediterranean policy of the European Union. There is in Italy a widespread feeling that Southern Europe seems to count less now than in the past. This is particularly true with regard to competition from Eastern Europe for economic assistance from the West, particularly from the EU, which, in the opinion of Southern European governments, is depriving the Mediterranean of substantial resources. (21)

With the rise of nationalism and fundamentalism, accompanied by growing security concerns, one of Italian main effort is that of helping the creation of a cohesive framework which would facilitate some kind of aggregation: the assumption being that risks and rivalries are more easily solved in a multilateral framework. Italy's relations with the countries of the Mediterranean region have long ceased to be considered in narrow economic terms and now represent a facet of the overall national security policy. Italy's Mediterranean policy is based on a comprehensive concept of security that regards political, cultural and economic factors as more important than purely military ones. Consequently, Italy's foreign policy strives to develop a strategy of cooperation with the countries of the area.

In accordance with the above considerations, the old CSCM project, which included four European countries (France, Italy, Spain and Portugal) and five Arab countries, members of the Arab Maghreb Union (Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia), was formally presented by Italy and Spain at the Mediterranean environment conference of the CSCE in September 1990. The idea, as we have said before, was to extend the logic of cooperation to the whole Mediterranean area, using the framework of rules and principles adopted in Europe with the CSCE

as a model.

The CSCM failed essentially because the US was more concerned with ensuring that the nascent peace process in the Middle East was not disrupted and because Europe adopted a rather cool attitude toward it. In particular, the leading position of the US in the Mediterranean was realistically recognised by the Italian government which, although if with some reluctance, officially withdrew the CSCM proposal.

Nevertheless, Italy has tried to launch new initiatives for the Mediterranean in the context of the transatlantic relations. In fact, during the last NATO summit, January 1994, our former prime minister Aurelio Ciampi stated that the Alliance should contribute more directly to the establishment of stability in the Mediterranean. Italy proposed the creation of a high-level, non-governmental study group with the participation of the Allies and some non-NATO Mediterranean countries (22). The purpose would be to promote stability and cooperation in the region. On this line is also the new government, which is among the more active promoter of the Mediterranean Forum, whose Agenda for the Mediterranean was officially launched the 3d of July 1994 in Alexandria (Egypt) on a plan prepared by the Italian government. (23)

One of the perceived weakness of Italian more assertive role in the Mediterranean is the fact that national actions are led in absence of a clear multilateral umbrella (e.g. European Union or NATO). In perspective there is a real risk of disagreement particularly with the US, to whom Italy could be less neutral and conciliatory than as it used to be. A new wave of nationalism could more easily erupt, now that the block-to-block policy of the Cold War has ended. Again here what is clearly needed is a strong and credible European "cover", which has some difficulty to emerge. Italians had to fight, at the eve of the Lisbon European Council of '92, for including the Mediterranean among those guidelines which had to be considered proper for joint actions as provided by art. J.3 of the Maastricht Treaty. This illustrates the reluctance of our partners to consider the Southern Region among EU's prioritarian interests and the difficulties of linking the Eastern crises to the Southern one. As a result of this isolation, the possibility of Italian unilateral moves in the Mediterranean cannot be excluded.

5. Conclusive remarks

For the time being, although there are several signs of change, it is difficult to assess a radical reversal in the traditional Italian commitments of the postwar period. The two main pillars, Europe and Atlantic Alliance, still continue to constitute the official policy of the Italian government and a source of generic consensus among the principal political actors. But because of the internal crises, Italy feels the risk of losing credibility and, therefore, diminishing its participation as an equal in the groupings of its traditional partners.

There is a fear of being excluded from the emerging core of the European Union, or of being marginalized in the G7. The same risks of exclusion are felt in a reformed UN Security Council or in new defence initiatives, (e.g. the Eurocorp), in which Italy, if accepted, fears it will be considered a second-rank country.

This means that if the multilateral framework continues to be considered the best solution to serve

Italian national interests, the perception of a certain marginalisation (or even singularisation) could foster the emergence of unilateral positions. We might assist in the near future to the raising of positions in Italy which are in contrast with both its original integrationist attitude and the firm preference for a multilateral approach in foreign policy. The present European and Italian crises have, in fact, led towards the birth of new kinds of internal political tendencies: (24)

(a) Neo-mercantilist. Proponents of this approach seek to exploit the relative advantage for trade of a policy of competitive devaluation for the lira. This is contrary to a longstanding conviction in the country that participation in the ERM, at any cost, would be a long-term advantage for the Italian economy; the reluctance of then-Prime Minister Giuliano Amato and the former Governor of the Bank of Italy, Aurelio Ciampi, to leave the ERM (September '92), was a result of that political philosophy. Presently there is no discussion about the re-entry into the ERM. Supporters of this tendency are both inside the government and in the very large sector of small and medium size enterprises, which for the first time after many years consider Europe as an obstacle to their plans of development.

(b) Neo-nationalist. The aim of this approach is that of reopening some of the contested agreements signed after the second World War, particularly those referring to the eastern border of Italy. The case of Slovenia is the most appropriate example. Proponents of this approach advanced also the geopolitical concept of "spheres of influence", as in the case of Somalia.

c) Neo-neutralist. Advocates of this approach would like to see a lesser engagement of Italy in the Western camp, favouring full assignment of authority to the UN, as a kind of world government.

The common elements in these three approaches is a policy of progressive disengagement of Italy from Europe, and support for greater national freedom in international affairs. What must be underlined is that in comparison with the beginning of the 1980s, today Italy suffers from a crisis of identity in relation to its famous pro-European spirit. For the time being, these positions do not represent real alternatives to Italy's traditional attachment to Europe; rather, they are limited to a group of intellectuals, who wish to add a geopolitical approach to Italian foreign policy, and to a few political forces--the MSI (traditional, extreme-right wing party) which shares the neo-nationalist attitude (the party voted against the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty); Rifondazione Comunista (the extreme left-wing party) which still favours a neutralist view and disengagement from NATO. Even if not generalized, these tendencies provide a first important sign of a possible radical change in Italy's international behaviour. Their prospects for success are still very low, but they could gain ground in the future.

There are two preconditions for Italy to remain on its own traditional track of transatlantic and European engagement, despite the above tendencies:

- the solution of its domestic crises and the homogeneity of the new government coalition;
- a favourable development of the international scenario towards a higher degree of multilateralisation; in particular, as far as Europe (and CFSP) is concerned, of the effectiveness of its cover function and the creation of credible security mechanisms.

At governmental level this second precondition, that of an effective transformation of EU into a political entity, is considered of a certain interest. Foreign minister Antonio Martino has

underlined that the process of european integration has to be less conditioned by macroeconomic criteria and more oriented towards credible and effective foreign and security policies (25). This could be an important element for preventing unilateral moves by Italy (and probably by other European countries) and for preventing neo-neutralist and neo-nationalist attitudes from gaining strength.

In the light of the case studies which we mentioned above, one important initiative to be taken is that of clarifying the role of the EU in the Mediterranean and neighbouring regions. A strict linkage between the European and Mediterranean theatre has to be established. More generally, for a country strategically located at the crossroads between Europe and the Mediterranean, the end of the Cold War has to be accompanied by an additional strengthening of the cover of multilateral institutions - not just in Europe - but also in the Mediterranean. Only under such a multilateral "umbrella" we might ensure that Italian contribution to the development of a common CFSP do not enter a period marked by considerable friction.

NOTES

1. See, IAI Report 1992. The Dual Crisis, *The International Spectator*, n.1, January-March, 1993, pp. 5-30.
2. G. Bonvicini, The new International Order and Italy's Role, *Lettera Italia*, n.1-2, January-June 1994, p. 53.
3. The CDU's proposal has been published in Italian: *Riflessioni sulla politica europea*, *Europe Documenti*, n.1895/96, September 7, 1994.
4. C. Merlini, The G-7 and the Need for Reform, *The International Spectator*, n.2, April-June, 1994, pp. 5-25.
5. N. Andreatta, Una politica estera per l'Italia, *Il Mulino*, n.349, May 1993.
6. The electoral platforms of Italian political parties have been published in the IAI's Yearbook: *L'Italia nella Politica Internazionale*, Anno Ventunesimo, Edizione 1994, SIPI Publisher, Roma.
7. C. Merlini, Six Proposals for Italian Foreign Policy, *The International Spectator*, n.3, July-September, 1993, pp. 5-20.
8. G. Bonvicini, Italy: an integrationist perspective, in C. Hill (ed.), *National Foreign Policies and European Political Cooperation*, Allen Unwin, London, 1983, pp. 71-82.
9. L. Guazzone, The Evolution of the Italian Mediterranean Policy and Italian Attitude towards the Palestinian Question, *Doc IAI 9209*, 1992.
10. F. Lay, *L'iniziativa italo tedesca per il rilancio dell'Unione Europea*, Cedam, Padua, 1983.
11. M. Neri Gualdesi, *L'Italia e la Ce. La partecipazione italiana alla politica d'integrazione europea 1980-1991*, Ets Editrice, Pisa, 1992, pp. 59-87.
12. R. Aliboni, Italy and the New International Context: An Emerging Foreign Policy Profile, *The International Spectator*, n.1, January-March 1985, pp. 3-17.
13. M. Cremasco, *From the Quadrangolare to the Central European Initiative*, *Doc IAI 9213*, 1992.
14. M. Neri Gualdesi, *op. cit.*, pp. 144-154 on the negotiations towards Maastricht.
15. "The commitment of the United States to NATO, which we deeply welcome, finds a Europe willing to shoulder greater responsibility. I am convinced that the progressive development of a European security and defense identity, first in the framework of the WEU and then I hope-as a part of the European Union, will prove to be its strongest asset.", from the speech of former prime minister Aurelio Ciampi at the NATO Summit, 11-12 January

1994.

- 16.N. Andreatta, La partecipazione dell'Italia al processo di integrazione europea nell'attuale momento della Comunità internazionale, Speech given at the University of Bologna, 12 July 1993, in which he presented Atlantic Charter Bis Proposal.
- 17.N. Andreatta, Statement to the Forty-Eight Session of the General Assembly, New York, 30 September 1993, in which he first mentioned the Italian proposal on the reforming of UN Security Council.
- 18.The geopolitical approach found its better expression in a new Italian Magazine "Limes: Rivista Italiana di Geopolitica" published by the Editoriale L'Espresso.
- 19.E. Greco, Italy's Policy Towards the Yugoslav Crisis, Doc IAI 9316E, 1993.
- 20.E. Greco, Italy, the Yugoslav Crisis and the Osimo Agreements, The International Spectator, n.1 January-March 1994.
- 21.In his Speech at the NATO Summit in Bruxelles, January 11-12 1994, former prime minister Aurelio Ciampi proposed: "the establishment of a high level study group, initially with a non governmental capacity, with the participation of our Allies and of some non-NATO Mediterranean Countries. Its purpose should be to define a political, economic and social concept, which would lead to a possible intergovernmental initiative aimed at promoting stability and cooperation in the Mediterranean Region."
- 22.R. Aliboni, L'Europa tra Est e Sud: sicurezza e cooperazione, Collana Lo Spettatore Internazionale, Angeli, Milano, 1992.
- 23.IAI, Cooperation and Stability in the Mediterranean: an Agenda for Partnership, The International Spectator, n.3 July-September 1994, pp. 5-20.
- 24.C. Merlini, Six Proposals for Italian Foreign Policy, op. cit.
- 25.A. Martino, Prepariamo subito la nuova Maastricht, Il Sole 24 Ore, 20 November 1994.