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After acquiring an outstanding profile in the eighties, Italy's policy towards the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern areas has undoubtedly been the subject of profound reconsideration in the subsequent decade, concerning both its goals and directions and its relative importance with respect to other areas. This change has been generated by external as well as domestic developments: the changes ushered in by the end of the Cold War and the situation ensuing from the longstanding domestic mismanagement of public finances.

Because of its financial difficulties, in the nineties Italy is finding itself increasingly deprived of the instruments and resources with which to conduct a foreign policy matching the international status that the country gradually acquired after post-Second World War reconstruction. Furthermore, such difficulties have emerged at a time when relations within Western and European alliances are tending to become more competitive and less protective, thus preventing Italy from taking advantage of the combination of low-cost membership in the alliances and high international prestige deriving from that very membership which used to prevail during the Cold War.

For these reasons, Italy is in the throes of a difficult political transition, implying both constitutional and financial changes and the need to adapt its foreign policy. At mid-decade, the outcome of this transition cannot yet be clearly identified. On the whole, however, a remarkable continuity seems to characterize both current developments and the future profile of Italy's foreign policy.

After a summary of Italian Mediterranean policies in the eighties, this chapter will take into consideration the new tendencies that have emerged in the nineties. It concludes with a discussion of conclusions and prospects.

Reinforcing Mediterranean policies in the eighties

It is a common place to point out that Italy's foreign policy during the Cold War was almost solely conducted along the lines and within the framework of the Atlantic Alliance and the European Community. Feeling weak sometimes with respect to the other members of the European Community, Italy tended to compensate for this weakness by staying close to the US in the Atlantic Alliance. But NATO's importance to Italy went far beyond its concern with the inter-European balance of power. Because of its geopolitical situation, Italy was able to obtain from the Alliance, and "consume" for its national security, a good deal more than it ever could "produce" and provide for the sake of the Alliance itself (1).

Broadly regarded by both other European countries (particularly France) and domestic oppositions (on both the left and right of the political spectrum) as one of the staunchest supporters of the Atlantic Alliance and the US, Italy nevertheless retained a margin of independence in its foreign policy. In a recent article, John W. Holmes (2) very aptly says that this independence was the inherent product of an objective situation: Italy was perfectly conscious of the fact that it would always be in the US interest to provide for the country's "ultimate security", and so was the US. It was for this reason that Italy was able to develop a number of independent foreign policies and interests, especially towards adjoining areas like the Mediterranean and the European East.

But such independence has never really affected Italy's fundamental faithfulness to and consistency with the Alliance, nor has it brought about significant clashes between national and

multilateral interests. If one refers to the Mediterranean, there were only two occasions in the course of the Cold War on which Italy's more or less well understood national interests risked turning this margin of independence into a clash between national assertiveness, on one hand, and the Alliance and the US, on the other. The first was with the so-called "neo-Atlanticist" approach developed in the fifties by leftwing leaders of the Christian Democratic Party (DC) such as Mr. Gronchi and Mr. Fanfani (3). After the failure of the 1956 Suez expedition and De Gaulle's rise to power in France in 1958, Italy's Catholic leftists thought that by increasing their role in the Atlantic Alliance they could convince the US to grant Italy -- a non-neocolonialist country with good relations with Arabs -- a special role in the Mediterranean. While obviously nothing came of this approach, there were diplomatic and political tensions both domestically and in trans-Atlantic relations. The second occasion, a more straightforward clash, occurred during the "Achille Lauro"-Sigonella crisis (4), against the background of the assertive national Mediterranean policy developed by Mr. Craxi and the attempt of the then Socialist-led government to elaborate a regional security policy in which Italy was expected to play a prominent role.

These two attempts remain exceptions, however, in a trend in which Italy's policies towards the Mediterranean were essentially consistent with its multilateral commitment in the Alliance. Nor should the "Achille Lauro"-Sigonella sequence be attributed too much significance in a decade which, broadly speaking, was very successful in coupling strict Italian support for the Alliance with a higher Italian profile. The result was that, especially in the eighties, Italy came to offer a much greater national contribution than the rather passive role of security consumer which had prevailed in the past.

The Italian role in the Alliance has been criticized by a number of analysts of the neo-geopolitical school of thought (5) which has emerged in Italy after the end of the Cold War for having led the country to disregard its national interests excessively: as they are wont to say, Italy completely "delegated" its foreign policy to the US and the alliances (especially NATO). Others have remarked that, on the contrary, sticking to multilateralism in the Western and European alliances during the Cold War was the best way to pursue Italy's national interests (6). Actually, the question of how national interests and multilateralism can be reconciled is less a question of the past (when this was well achieved by adhering strictly to Western multilateralism) than a question of the current post-Cold War era, in which national interests seem to prevail and it is not yet clear how international cooperation can be strengthened and attained. Italy has a different problem with its Cold War foreign policy and its margin of independence: the question is not whether Italy was unable or unwilling to assert the right quantum of national interests in the alliances but whether it was able to respond over time to changes in the international situation and growing demands from the alliances for new burdens to be shared and additional resources to be contributed.

In the eighties, Italian foreign policy definitely made a remarkable effort to respond to newly emerging demands and objectives in the alliances. This proved particularly true with respect to events in the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern areas. There is no doubt that non-Catholic Italian prime ministers, such as Mr. Giovanni Spadolini and Mr. Bettino Craxi, who led the centre-left coalition governments in the second half of the eighties, provided an unprecedented boost to Italian foreign policy and that the Mediterranean and the Middle East played a remarkable role in this framework of enhanced international initiative.

After a few contributions to international peace operations -- like the one in the Sinai MFOs -- it was in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, with the 1979 intervention in Lebanon, that the Italian government started to contribute military forces in a more systematic way to the international and multinational peace-related missions set up by the UN, the WEU and groups of governments to intervene in the area.

Interventions in the Mediterranean and the Middle East were, at one and the same time, a driving force and the result of a debate (7) initiated in the same years on the need to give more

weight to Italy's defence efforts towards the Alliance's Mediterranean southern flank with respect to the focus traditionally kept on the southeastern section of the Alliance's central front. The reshuffling of the main national defense missions envisaged by the Italian Chiefs of Staff, advocated in 1985 in a "White Paper" commissioned by Mr. Spadolini, began to give way to a change in Italy's military model entailing increases in forces' mobility, armaments and professionalism. The debate on the renewal of the Italian military model is still underway and after a bold start has not delivered too much so far. But it cannot be overlooked that the contributions to international intervention carried out by Italy, from Lebanon to Bosnia, have been made possible by the debate initiated in the eighties in relation to the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

Combining multilateralism and bilateralism

These moves on the multilateral side were coupled by the strengthening of bilateral policies towards the areas south of Western Europe. There was a substantial increase in bilateral development aid. Bilateral political relations with the most important countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean were expanded and upgraded.

Between 1980 and 1990 Italy's official development aid (ODA) increased from US $683 to 2,615 million at current prices (from 1,043 to 2,764 at constant 1989 prices), the most important increase ever in Italy's development cooperation resources (8). In the same period, while sub-Saharan Africa continued to enjoy absolute priority as the destination of Italian aid, the Mediterranean area and Latin America competed for second and third place. Regardless of priorities and percentages, the sheer amount of disbursements permitted by the overall aid increase turned aid to the Mediterranean into an important support for Italy's foreign policy (and economic penetration) in that area.

As for political relations, reference has to be made to two main developments. First, Italy's decision in 1980 to unilaterally guarantee Malta's neutral status and provide regular financial support to the island. Though Malta represented a minor risk on the whole, the Italian move was very congenial to the Alliance in view of the ambiguities of Dom Mintoff's government with respect to both Libya and the Soviet Union. Second, bilateral political relations and consultations with North African and Middle Eastern countries received an unprecedented boost by all leaders, from Mr. Andreotti through to Mr. Spadolini and Mr. Craxi. Inspired by the latter, the Socialists were the ones who envisaged the most articulated political project. The upgrading of relations with the most important countries of the Southern Mediterranean was aimed at establishing a kind of regional group with the task of securing stability and security in the area (9). The group was intended to act in tune with non-Mediterranean interests and powers, especially the US, but without being overly dependent on them. At that time, there was much talk in Socialist quarters about the Contadora Group as a blueprint to be taken up and developed in the Mediterranean. Much of the course Mr. Craxi decided to pursue during the "Achille Lauro"-Sigonella crisis - in particular, the strong understanding the Italian government wished to maintain with Egypt - can be explained as an attempt to reinforce the grouping policy that was so central to Mr. Craxi's political strategy towards the Mediterranean.

Such a reinforcement of bilateral ties in the area made it possible for Mr. Gianni De Michelis, who became foreign minister in 1989, to envisage a foreign policy characterized by a particularly proactive and dynamic combination of bilateral policies inspired by national interests and multilateralism. Drawing on the experience Italy had accumulated in the eighties, he tried to make the country something more than a staunch and passive -- sometime even oblique -- supporter of the Western and European alliances by bringing stronger Italian commitments and more constructive contributions into the framework of these alliances. While Mr. De Michelis' lifestyle and flamboyancy drew criticism, impatience and sarcastic remarks, in the end, his policy

failed because of the unexpected changes in both international relations and Italian domestic affairs brought about by the end of the Cold War. Nonetheless, it epitomized fairly well how much ground Italy had covered by the end of the eighties in moving from a sheer consumer of security to a more responsible partnership within the alliances.

Under Mr. De Michelis' guidance, Italy contributed to promoting two main initiatives in the Mediterranean, the Western Mediterranean Group, which was set up in Rome in October 1990, and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean (CSCM), which was presented by Italy and Spain in Palma de Mallorca in September 1990 on the occasion of a meeting of the CSCE (10). These new Mediterranean initiatives cannot be appreciated unless they are regarded in the wider context of De Michelis' foreign policy. In this context, Italy also started to promote a sub-regional understanding in Central and Southeastern Europe. These two regional directions of Italian foreign policy were expected to reflect national Italian interests and, at the same time, to reinforce European cohesion. While France, Spain and Italy were expected to lead European initiatives in the Mediterranean, Italy was supposed to cooperate with Germany towards the European East. For this policy to succeed, however, an essential factor was the strengthening of the European Union's new Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). For this reason, Italy made a strong effort to promote the CFSP and to find a working compromise between Germany and France, on the one hand, and the United Kingdom, on the other, in view of the signing of the Maastricht Treaty. Indeed, in order for Italian regional initiatives to succeed and meet the national interests involved, a strong European Union had to be in place.

The efforts and projects just mentioned marked the apogee of Italy's Mediterranean policy. Thereafter, the changes brought about by the end of the Cold War and the Gulf war triggered the swift decline of this policy and made it come to nothing. Inherently weak, the CFSP was unable to stand up to the dilemmas and divisions generated in the European Union and the Atlantic Alliance by the break-up of Yugoslavia. Events in the European East and the unification of Germany created divisions and raised fears among the members of the Union and, along with developments in the former Yugoslavia, voided the Italian initiative towards Central and Southeastern Europe of meaning. Finally, whereas the Western Mediterranean Group came to a standstill because of the sanctions on Libya and the beginning of the crisis in Algeria, the CSCM and the potential for a European initiative towards southern areas were overwhelmed by the Gulf war and subsequently replaced by the US role in the Madrid process.

In conclusion, somewhat ironically, Italy's Mediterranean and Middle Eastern policy at the end of the eighties suffered a collapse at the very time when it appeared to have ultimately reached a fair and consistent combination between multilateralism and national interest in the Mediterranean as well as in the wider circle of its foreign policy.

Emphasizing multilateralism in the nineties

After the end of East-West confrontation, all Western countries were faced with the need to adapt their foreign policies to the emerging international environment. But this task proved particularly difficult for Italy because the end of the Cold War also brought an end to the rent provided to Italy by its special geostrategic position in the Alliance. In the more demanding and competitive relations characterizing post-Cold War multilateralism within Western and European alliances, Italy was suddenly confronted with higher costs than its allies. Furthermore, while facing such additional costs, Italy also had to withstand the consequences of the financial mismanagement of the eighties and the collapse of its by now eroded domestic political system (a system in many ways related to the Cold War situation and Italy's role in it). Thus, the international weakness was coupled with a particularly difficult domestic situation (11).

The parliamentary elections of Spring 1996 brought in a government supported by a leftwing coalition. If this coalition manages to maintain its cohesion while pushing through political reforms and harsh financial restructuring, Italy may achieve the transition initiated in the

Spring of 1992 with the collapse of the last Andreotti's cabinet under the weight of appalling corruption and such flagrant financial mismanagement as to put into question Italy's participation in the common European effort to establish a streamlined monetary and economic union pursuant to the new Treaty of Maastricht.

In the few years since the major domestic crisis in 1992, the transition towards a more stable political system has been characterized by remarkable instability: Andreotti's last government has been followed by five cabinets. Governments have changed every year, from June 1992, when Mr. Giuliano Amato was appointed as prime minister, through to May 18, 1996, when the current government of Mr. Romano Prodi was sworn in (12). It must also be said that, unlike what used to happen in the political system of the Cold War era, present instability has a more systemic character, as it works in a political arena that has not yet managed to find the new shared institutions it requires (for example, an effective new electoral system). Furthermore, the rightwing government led by Mr. Berlusconi attempted to introduce system a winner-take-all by changing leadership not only at the top of the government hierarchy - as was the case in the previous system - but also at intermediate and lower levels of power. This attempt stirred shock waves in the country and, unsuccessful and short-lived as it was, eventually contributed to increasing instability and turmoil.

All these factors have hardly eased the steering of national foreign (and defense) policies in the first part of the nineties. Moreover, they have hardly allowed these policies to be in the forefront of the Italian political stage. Intertwined with the financial and economic restructuring of the country, EU and European policies have become the almost all-absorbing focus of both domestic and foreign policy. But, while European policy tends to be turned into a dimension of Italian domestic policy, foreign policy as a whole - including Mediterranean policy - has been neglected and sacrificed. Foreign policy cannot but reflect the sharp and repeated reductions that have taken place since 1992 in the state budget and affect such diverse and important policy instruments as international aid or military forces for peace-related missions. In order to fund the small contingent sent to Bosnia, the government had to introduce an *ad hoc* additional tax on gasoline. As for development aid, the first years of this decade have witnessed a continuous reduction of available funds: bilateral ODA went down from 3,354 billion Lire in 1990 to 1,110 in 1994 and this trend has continued (13). In recent years, foreign policy has often been reduced to a sort of declaratory policy, strongly dependent for real action on the policies carried out within multilateral alliances.

This dependence on multilateral policies must be regarded as the outstanding characteristic of Italy's foreign policy in the nineties. In fact, whatever the balance-sheet at the end of the decade, there is no doubt that Italy's foreign policy in the nineties will be noted for seeking to quash tendencies towards re-nationalization, to restore and strengthen multilateralism and upgrade its ability to play multilateral games as the sole way to meet national interests and maintain or regain its international prestige and status.

This trend may appear somehow ironical in view of the fact that, with the collapse of the political class that ruled during the Cold War, a very vocal public debate has been raised by the emerging neo-geopolitical Italian school of thought about the necessity to work out a foreign policy predicated on the assertion of national interests (after these interests -- so the argument runs -- were neglected during the Cold War) in a world that is going to be dominated once again by competition and scrambling among nations. It was thought that the advent of Mr. Berlusconi's government in May 1994 would give way to such an assertive policy, but it soon became apparent that Italy was unable to assert anything at all and that its policy of national assertiveness in Istria as well as in the European Union did nothing but isolate and weaken it internationally without any appreciable result. The end of Mr. Berlusconi's government only eight months after it was sworn in cut short any illusions or expectations of national assertiveness and fully restored Italy's traditional multilateralist approach. As a consequence, any extremism incurred by the neo-

geopolitical school of thought was quickly downsized. Today, very few would doubt that Italy's primary interest is in strong multilateralism and the debate refers mostly to diverse emphases or options in an essentially multilateral framework.

Italy's interest in the Mediterranean has, however, been strongly challenged by the trend referred to here as the Italian neo-geopolitical school. Two main arguments have been developed by this school: first, that the Mediterranean is no more than a second-rank option within the range of Italy's national interests (and that Italy's geopolitical focus has to become the European East as well as the global economy) (14); second, that, to the extent to which an interest in the Mediterranean survives, Italy should concentrate on a few countries, like Egypt and Libya, rather than dwell on comprehensive schemes of regional or inter-regional relations (15). In relation to these countries, Italy should not be interested in complying with allied policies seeking to take a distance from the regime's policies towards political Islam or to isolate rogue countries by international sanctions and so forth. A broader argument is that since the interest of the most important EU members in the Mediterranean is marginal, concentrating Italy's efforts on this area would not pay off in terms of European influence and status.

The need to turn more decisively from the Mediterranean and the Middle East towards Eastern-Central and Southeastern Europe is voiced with particular vigour. Italian investment in Eastern Europe, particularly in Romania and Albania, and economic relations with Russia and Southeastern Europe have actually significantly increased since the end of the Cold War. But the persistent weakness of the Central-European Initiative should remind Italy of its fundamental lack of national political instruments in the region. Despite the very good prospects for Italian economic penetration in Eastern Europe, Italian interest in the development of an area like the Mediterranean, from which its gas and oil essentially come, cannot be lower than its interest in Eastern regions. The argument could be, rather, that an increasing interest in the East is only natural with the return of this area to cooperative international relations. All in all, Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean were always important directions for Italy during the Cold War and will continue to be so in the future.

Whatever the substance of these arguments, the Italian governments of the nineties - despite some confused attempts by Mr. Berlusconi's cabinet to work out a more "national-interest-based" approach - have lent a deaf ear to this debate and, rather more in tune with both traditional Italian policy and rhetoric, have pursued a Mediterranean policy which reflects the broad weaknesses of the country in its current painful transition while remaining quite important and respectable. The major weakness lies in Italy's inability to pursue a bilateral policy as strong as that carried out at the end of the eighties. In fact, as already noted, the thrust of Italy's Mediterranean policy in the nineties is to be found almost exclusively in the multilateral sphere. True, the modesty of bilateral contributions weakens Italy's presence and role within today's Mediterranean multilateral policy frameworks, from the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership to NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue. Nevertheless, Italy's effort in these frameworks should not be underestimated both *per se* and as a factor that may well upgrade Italy's role in the alliances as soon as the domestic transition is successfully completed and a stronger bilateral contribution is once again possible.

All five governments of the post-Cold War era, including Mr. Berlusconi's, have more or less stressed their attachment to the Mediterranean direction in Italian foreign policy. However, the most conscious and articulated supporter of Italy's need to promote a Mediterranean policy was Mr. Carlo Azeglio Ciampi in his capacity as prime minister from April 1993 through May 1994. Mr. Ciampi's foreign policy was predicated on two straight and strong assumptions: first, that the European nations have to remain firmly framed by the system of alliances established after the tragedy of the Second World War, even if there are prices to be paid for that (an assumption that continues to inspire him in his current task of Minister of the Treasury in Mr. Prodi's government) and, second, that Italy has a basic interest and role to play in the

Mediterranean area and the task of maintaining a link between the Mediterranean and the Mitteleuropean worlds. In a speech given at the end of his mandate, he pointed out that the European Union's cohesion and success rest on its ability to "hold a fair balance internally between the two principal components of its identity: the Mitteleuropean and the Mediterranean. Both of them are equally vital and have, in the course of centuries, enlivened one another" (16).

Mr. Ciampi promoted Italy's Mediterranean initiative in two directions: in the Mediterranean sphere itself, by helping to establish the Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation in the Mediterranean in cooperation with Egypt and a set of other countries belonging to the area (17); and in NATO, by convincing the other members of the Alliance, in tandem with Spain, to affirm the necessity of a trans-Atlantic move towards the area (18).

The Forum was an initiative of the Egyptian government, by which it intended to allay frustrations and concerns over the regional and international changes brought about by the end of the Cold War. At that time, Egypt began to perceive that the Arab-Israeli peace process, the implications of the 1990-91 Gulf war and the policies pursued by the US from its all-dominant position in the Middle East, were altering the strategic balance and threatening its traditional leadership in the region (19). Consequently, Egypt was also concerned that the huge amount of foreign aid extended to it by both the US and the Gulf Arab countries - largely because of its important strategic role in the region - could be put in jeopardy in the less immediate future. The Mediterranean option emerged at the end of 1993 as an element of a new Egyptian strategy to check this decline in influence and was manifest in the proposal to establish the Forum as a tie with the southern members of the EU as well as in Egypt's request to join the Arab Maghreb Union and become a member of the (sleeping) Group of 5 + 5 (i.e. in what must have appeared to Cairo as a sphere of privileged cooperation with Europe). Briefly, the emerging prospects in the region persuaded Egypt to promote Mediterranean solidarity as a further option in the region and as a means for strengthening ties with the European Union.

The idea was first launched in early 1993. In January 1994, the Egyptian initiative was favourably received by Mr. Ciampi, and the Italian Foreign Minister, Mr. Beniamino Andreatta. Throughout the first semester of 1994 the Italian diplomacy committed itself to developing the Forum and to this end asked the International Affairs Institute in Rome to prepare a report on what could be done to implement cooperation in concrete terms within the Forum (20). This report - entitled "Med-2000" - was then adopted as the terms of reference of the Working Groups which were eventually established by the Alexandria ministerial meeting of the Forum in July 1994.

The meeting in Alexandria was held at a time when the first building blocks were being placed by the EU on the way towards the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership - EMP (finally formally established in Barcelona in November 1995). The EMP, very eagerly espoused and supported by Italy from the European Council in Corfu (June 1994) to the one in Cannes (June 1995), soon made the Forum obsolete. Although the Forum continues to meet and work, its identity has been greatly weakened by the fact that the Forum's principal aims are now pursued far more effectively by the EMP. The question that can be asked in relation to these developments is why the Italian government pursued the Forum when the process that was to lead the EU to Barcelona had already been initiated.

The answer is that in the first semester of 1994, it was not very clear where the EU and the Mediterranean were going to go from there. There was a feeling among Southern European countries that something had to be done to relink Europe to the Middle East and the Mediterranean after the Gulf war and the course assumed by the Madrid process had weakened European trans-Mediterranean ties. Besides, there was also the feeling that something had to be done to rebalance the unilateral eastward direction that the emerging European Union's CFSP was taking. In this framework the Italian diplomacy saw the Forum as an instrument with which to stop the drift of the Mediterranean with respect to Europe (and the drift of Southern Europe with respect to Northern Europe) and grasped it.

To be sure, the Forum could be regarded as a framework reproducing some elements of Mr. Craxi's past aspirations to set up some kind of Mediterranean caucus, but there is no doubt that the Italian government had no intention to create a Mediterranean solidarity in opposition to a Euro-Mediterranean scheme. At that time, such a Euro-Mediterranean scheme was vaguely envisaged --in Italy and elsewhere-- as an adaptation of either the longstanding EU Mediterranean policy or the idea of the CSCM (Conference for Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean). In fact, the IAI's report, presented by the Italian government in Alexandria, included a proposal for setting up a Euro-Mediterranean form of political cooperation very similar to the one that is presently being implemented within the Barcelona process.

Subsequently, Italy co-initiated and very firmly supported the Barcelona process. During its EU Presidency in the first semester of 1966, the Italian government took various initiatives particularly devoted to developing the cultural dialogue between Europe and the South Mediterranean partners in the EMP. Most importantly, Italy successfully steered the Senior Official Committee in its task of drawing up the blueprint for the "Action Plan" on which the EMP's security policies will be predicated as the process goes further.

In fact, there is strong political continuity between the Forum and the Italian contribution to the Barcelona process, in the sense that Italy is pursuing the same political goals in the EMP that it wanted to attain in the Forum. No doubt, Italy feels more at ease in the stronger multilateral framework provided by the EMP. True, the Forum was also a multilateral framework, but it could not take advantage of the means and the political authority now made available by the Euro-Mediterranean process started in Barcelona. For a country whose bilateral policies and instruments are constrained by domestic problems, the EMP is certainly providing a more effective framework than the Forum. Nonetheless, Italy has not dismissed the Forum. This may indicate that it continues to be attracted by the idea of a Mediterranean caucus besides the EMP, which could be revived in the future and find a role for itself in the narrower Mediterranean arena.

The second basic idea put forward by Mr. Ciampi that contributes to forming the backbone of Italy's Mediterranean policy in the nineties, is that NATO has to play a role in the relations with South Mediterranean countries. After the NATO Summit of January 1994, in which the idea was strongly promoted by the Italian government with French and Spanish support, Spain took up the initiative (at the NATO meeting in Seville in September 1994) and at the beginning of 1995 the Mediterranean Dialogue became an official initiative of the Alliance, though it was inaugurated by a very unfortunate declaration of the Secretary-General that equated political Islam to Communism as the new enemy of the Atlantic Alliance or by an unfortunate misinterpretation of that declaration; either way, the bad impression created was never really dispelled in subsequent developments (21).

The Mediterranean Dialogue - similarly to the WEU Dialogue - has not made any significant progress since its inception. NATO officials are very careful to point out that the Dialogue is nothing more than what the word suggests and that it has no other task than that of providing mutual information and correcting southern Mediterranean misperceptions about NATO and its transformation after the end of the Cold War (22). However, this respectable task is something less than what the initiators had in mind. This limited approach reflects the fact that NATO has in principle accepted to include a Mediterranean dimension in its activities but is still not really prepared to develop it for the time being: eventual enlargement to Eastern European countries, intervention in Bosnia and establishment of a European identity within the Alliance seem to be more urgent on the NATO agenda than Mediterranean initiatives.

Nonetheless, Italy has taken up the initiative again. At the informal October 1995 NATO meeting in Williamsburg, the Italian Minister of Defense, Gen. Domenico Corcione, urged his colleagues to consider the launching of a "Partnership for the Mediterranean" (PfM) modelled on NATO's Partnership for Peace with Central European countries. In this and other statements on the same subject (23), Gen. Corcione provided varying suggestions for the possible contents and

tasks that could be given to the PfM, from "soft security" and "political counterproliferation" to policies to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. He stressed the necessity of a gradual and prudent approach in an area that is very different from Eastern Europe, including the need to start with the most moderate countries among those lying on the southern shore of the Mediterranean.

There is no doubt that Italy's PfM initiative is being developed with some American understanding. It is known that the initiative was discussed between Gen. Corcione and Mr. Perry before being disclosed. In any case, the available literature (24) reveals that a group at the Rand Corporation in Santa Monica is exploring the same topic. At the beginning of 1996, the Italian Military Center for Strategic Studies (CeMiSS), part of the staff of the Ministry of Defense, initiated a research project on the PfM in cooperation with the Rand team and at the same time requested the IAI (the Italian International Affairs Institute in Rome) to conduct an enquiry on the same subject. This work is directed at enabling Italy, perhaps with US support, to table a more substantive proposal on NATO Mediterranean activities when, according to expectations, at the end of 1997 or in 1998 the time will be ripe for adding the need for progress in the Mediterranean to NATO's agenda.

Italy's EU- and NATO-related Mediterranean initiatives underline the continuity of a kind of two-track policy that is not new in Italian post-Second World War foreign policy. It sheds light on Italy's lasting interest that the US be present in both the Mediterranean and the European arenas and, more broadly speaking, that the trans-Atlantic dimension merge with the European one. It also sheds light on the fact that, as usual, the Italian military tends to emphasize the trans-Atlantic framework, whereas Italian diplomats are closer to the European sphere, though there is a strong convergence on the fact that both contexts must be present to secure a maximum of stability and security for the country.

This two-track policy is reflected in the policy conducted by Italy in the nineties with respect to the inclusion of a security and defense component in the European Union. Italy has always supported the strengthening of a European security and defense identity, but on the condition that it be closely related to NATO. In the end, this was Italy's position in the negotiations of the Intergovernmental Conference which led to the signing of the Maastricht Treaty. In the same period, Italy avoided joining the French-German Eurocorp for fear of creating cleavages between Europe and the US. Today, Italy is perfectly at ease in strongly supporting the process that should bring about the drawing up of a European Defense Identity inside NATO. Meanwhile, the interest in NATO goes hand in hand with interest in European military integration. In fact, the two-track policy is also reflected in Italy's participation in the WEU's Euromarfor and Eurofor, in cooperation with France and Spain, for implementation of military instruments essentially devoted to performing Petersberg-like missions in the Mediterranean area.

Conclusions and prospects

As already pointed out, Italy's policy towards the Mediterranean in this decade is deeply affected by an adverse combination of international and domestic changes.

In this changing framework, there have been political and cultural trends towards a more assertive foreign policy, mostly directed at Eastern Europe, thus de-emphasizing the traditional importance assigned by the country to the Mediterranean area. These trends, however, have come to almost nothing. In fact, Italy's governments have continued to pursue significant Mediterranean policies and the accentuation of multilateralism as a way out of the numerous current constraints. Consequently, Italian initiatives have mostly emerged in European and trans-Atlantic multilateral spheres.

The inception of the Barcelona process has provided Italy with a multilateral framework in which it can conduct a Mediterranean policy more significant than that which it could otherwise carry out bilaterally or even in cooperation with the other Southern European nations. In addition

to its inherent political and military relevance, the development of a Mediterranean dimension in NATO is above all a reassurance for Italy against the risks of becoming marginal on the EU political stage as well as in the framework of the EU Mediterranean policy - hence, the traditional two-track Mediterranean (and European) policy mainly predicated on multilateral spheres, which secures not only strong continuity but even accentuate Italy's past preference for multilateralism.

In perspective, this picture poses two questions. From the point of view of the European Union's political process, adoption of the new EU Mediterranean policy in Barcelona amounts to closing the perceived gap between East and South and integrating Eastern and Southern policies in the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy. In other words, the Barcelona process means reinforcement of EU cohesion. The first question for Italy is that its two-track policy should contribute to strengthening trans-Atlantic links without weakening recently reinforced European cohesion. This issue goes beyond the Mediterranean and does not concern Italy alone, for - in a sense - almost all European countries have a two-track policy and a more or less strong interest today in developing a European Defense Identity within NATO. However, frustrations and tensions in the difficult intra-European negotiations ahead may push Italy to emphasise trans-Atlantic reassurances instead of supporting European cohesion and its French-German core. The successful integration of Italy in the first circle of the EU monetary and economic union would reassure Italy and help it conduct its two-track policy fairly and cooperatively.

The second question, which pertains more closely to the Mediterranean, is that the weakness of the bilateral policy component cannot last for long. This weakness is not felt by Italy alone, but by the entire range of Southern European countries: while the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern policy of Greece is almost solely dominated by its concerns with Turkey, Spain has not yet been able to devote sufficient resources and instruments to conducting a strong bilateral policy in addition to its remarkable contribution in the multilateral sphere; because of its domestic problems, Italy has been compelled to decrease sharply the resources for the Mediterranean which had enjoyed a considerable increase in the eighties; after being elected, President Chirac stressed the role France is willing to play in the Mediterranean, the Middle East and Africa, but the country continues to be absorbed by the need to reshape its European, trans-Atlantic and global role and, despite some initiatives, like the one in Lebanon in the Spring of 1996, it is clear that France is unable to play the same role south of Europe that Germany is currently playing in leading and combining multilateral and bilateral policy components east of the Union.

Italy alone cannot play in the Mediterranean the role that Germany is playing in Eastern Europe nor can it replace France in the area. It can, however, contribute to improving the situation. This means that Italy has to reinforce its bilateral policy towards the Mediterranean, as soon as this is possible, unless it wants to run the risk of jeopardizing its multilateral efforts. Besides, Italy has to continue to strengthen its successful cooperation with France and Spain in an effort to introduce a strong Southern European element in the EU Mediterranean policy. In this sense, the establishment of Euromarfor and Eurofor (25) within the WEU is a right step both in the region and in the context of the European and trans-Atlantic alliances.

Notes

(1) Stefano Silvestri, "L'Italia: partner fedele ma di basso profilo", in Luigi Caligaris (a cura di), *La Difesa europea: Proposte e sfide*, Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale, Edizioni di Comunità, Milano, 1990, pp. 185-202.
(2) "Italy: In the Mediterranean, *but* of it?", *Mediterranean Politics*, vol. 1, No. 2, Autumn 1996, pp. 176-192.
(3) See: Sergio Romano, *Guida alla politica estera italiana*, Rizzoli, Milano, 1993, pp. 86 and 97-101; Paolo Cacace, *Venti anni di politica estera italiana (1943-1963)*, Bonacci, Roma, chapters XLII-XLIV.
(4) See: Gianpaolo Calchi Novati, "The Case of the Achille Lauro Hijacking and Italo-Arab Relations: One Policy, Too Many Policies, No Policy", *Journal of Arab Affairs*, vol. 10, No. 2, Fall 1991, pp. 153-179; Annette Jünemann, *Italiens Nahost Politik von 1980 bis 1990*, Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, Baden Baden, 1993, chapter 3; Bijan Zarmandili, *Documenti di un dirottamento. Il caso "Achille Lauro" nei giornali e in televisione*, ERI, Torino, 1988.
(5) See the opening statement and, in particular, the contributions by Ernesto Galli della Della Loggia, Angelo Panebianco and Gian Enrico Rusconi in the first issue of *Limes. Rivista di geopolitica*, No. 1-2, 1993, pp. 7-26. Also: S. Romano, *op. cit.* and Ernesto Galli Della Loggia, "La morte della patria. La crisi dell'idea di nazione dopo la seconda guerra mondiale", in Giovanni Spadolini (a cura di), *Nazione e nazionalità in Italia. Dall'alba del secolo ai nostri giorni*, Laterza, Bari, 1994, pp. 125-61; Carlo M. Santoro, *La politica estera di una media potenza. L'Italia dall'unità ad oggi*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1991.
(6) Cesare Merlini, "Cinque punti sul nazionalismo italiano", *Il Mulino. Europa/2*, No. 43, November 1994, pp. 89-99.
(7) C.M. Santoro (a cura di), *L'elmo di Scipio. Studi sul modello di difesa italiano*, Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1992; S. Silvestri (a cura di), *Nuove concezioni del modello difensivo italiano*, CeMiSS, ed. Rivista Militare, Roma, 1990; M. Cremasco (a cura di), *Lo strumento militare italiano*, IAI, Franco Angeli, Milano, 1986.
(8) Pierangelo Isernia, *La cooperazione allo sviluppo*, Il Mulino Bologna, 1995, pp. 143-145 and 242-249.
(9) See Roberto Aliboni, "Institutionalizing Mediterranean Relations: Complementarity and Competition", *Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft* (Bonn), No. 3, pp. 290-99.
(10) Ettore Greco, Laura Guazzone, "Continuity and Change in Italy's Security Policy", in R. Aliboni (ed.), *Southern European Security in the 1990s*, Pinter Publishers, London and New York, 1992, pp. 69-85 ; Laura Guazzone, "Italy and the Gulf Crisis", in N. Gnesotto, J. Roper (eds.), *Western Europe and the Gulf*, The WEU Institute for Security Studies, Paris, 1992, pp. 71-87.
(11) See: "IAI Report 1992 - The Dual Crisis", *The International Spectator*, Vol. 27, No. 1, January-March 1993, pp. 5-30.
(12) Between the governments of Mr. Amato and Mr. Prodi there were those of Mr. Ciampi (sworned in on April 29, 1994), Mr. Berlusconi (May 11, 1994), and Mr. Dini (January 17, 1995).
(13) José Luis Rhi-Sausi (a cura di), La crisi della cooperazione italiana, Rapporto CeSPI sull'aiuto pubblico allo sviluppo, Edizioni associate, Roma, 1994, see p. 11.
(14) Carlo Jean, , *Geopolitica*, Laterza, Bari, 1995, chapter 11 and p. 260; Ludovico Incisa di Camerana, "I presupposti di una nuova politica estera italiana", *Relazioni Internazionali* (Milano), March 1993, pp. 62-70; Carlo Maria Santoro, "Rischio Mediterraneo", *Relazioni Internazionali* (Milano), July 1994, pp. 2-3. For Italy's global-economy connection see Marcello Pacini, «Geoeconomia, la parola chiave per orientarsi nel mercato futuro», *La Stampa* (Torino), 3 December 1995.
(15) The journal of the new geopolitical Italian school, *Limes*,

published an issue (No. 2, 1994) devoted to Italy's relations with the Mediterranean and the Middle East in which the editorial introductory article, "Arabia Infelix", insists on this point. The same issue contains an article published under the pseudonym Linus, underlining Italy's national interests in Libya: "Perché ci serve Gheddafi", pp. 227-232.

(16) Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, "L'eclissi del bipolarismo e il nuovo multipolarismo instabile: riflessioni sulla ricomposizione del sistema internazionale a livello globale e regionale", in Istituto Affari Internazionali, *L'Italia nella politica internazionale. Anno ventunesimo*, SIPI, Roma, 1994, pp. 251-258.

(17) Algeria, Egypt, France, Greece, Italy, Morocco, Portugal, Spain, Tunisia and Turkey, later joined by Malta. On this Forum, see Roberto Aliboni, "Institutionalizing ...", *op. cit.*, p. 297; s.a., *The Mediterranean Forum*, documenti IAI, IAI9512, Rome, 1995.

(18) See point 22 in the press communiqué issued by the Council of the Heads of State and Government held in Brussels on 10-11 January 1994.

(19) Abdel Monem Said Aly, "From Geo-Politics to Geo-Economics.Egyptian National Security Perceptions", in UNIDIR, *National Threat Perceptions in the Middle East*, Research Paper No. 37, United Nations, New York and Geneva, 1995, pp. 17-30; Mohammed El-Sayed Selim, *Mediterraneanism: A New Dimension in Egypt's Foreign Policy*, Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, Strategic Papers No. 27, March 1995.

(20) See: "Cooperation and Stability in the Mediterranean: An Agenda for Partnership", *The International Spectator*, Vol. XXIX, No. 3, July-September 1994, pp. 5-20.

(21) Gareth M. Winrow, A Threat from the South? NATO and the Mediterranean, Mediterranean Politics, Vol. 1, No. 1, Summer 1996, pp. 43-59.

(22) Sergio Balanzino, "Security Challenges in the Mediterranean Region", in R. Aliboni, G. Joffé, T. Niblock, *Security Challenges in the Mediterranean Region*, Frank Cass, London, pp. 187-192 (Mr. Balanzino is Deputy Secretary-General of NATO).

(23) The Williamsburg statement is summarized in *Atlantic News*, No. 2735, 6 October 1995. A subsequent statement was made in Turin at the 41st Annual Session of the North Atlantic Assembly on October 9, 1995 and can be found in the official proceedings of the Assembly.

(24) F. Stephen Larrabee, Carla Thornson, *Mediterranean Security: New Issues and Challenges, Conference Proceedings, Brussels, October 15-17, 1995*, Rand, Santa Monica (Ca), 1996; Ronald D. Asmus, F. Stephen Larrabee, Ian O. Lesser, "Mediterranean Security: New Challenges, New Tasks", *NATO Review*, May 1996, pp. 25-29.

(25) See details on Euromarfor and Eurofor in John W. Holmes, *op. cit.*