

DOCUMENTI IAI

ITALY AND WEU

by Gianni Bonvicini

Paper prepared for the research project on "Europeanizing security" and presented at the Working Group meeting organized by AIGCS and CSIS on "WEU and NATO", Washington, 5 May 1997

ITALY AND WEU

by Gianni Bonvicini

It must be noted at the outset that the Western European Union (WEU) has never played a primary role among foreign policy and security issues in Italy. The WEU has emerged only sporadically as the subject of political discussion and initiative; to be more precise three main periods can be specified:

- in 1984, when it was first revived after the long period of hibernation that followed its inception (1954);
- in 1991, concurrent with the Anglo-Italian declaration prior to the signing of the Treaty of Maastricht;
- in recent months, on the eve of the Amsterdam Conference (June 1997) which is to precede the revision of the Treaty of Maastricht.

In short, the WEU has stood in the wings with respect to the more crucial issues of NATO and the security and defense aspects of European political integration¹. For this reason, the WEU must be set in these two key contexts to be able to understand how it has been used by Italy's diplomacy and government. Nevertheless the history of Italian attitude and of its evolution towards WEU, albeit of secondary importance, represents a good case study for the understanding of some of the more significant elements of the Italian foreign and security policy in the context of the process of European integration. It can be of use also for the analysis of the today European role of Italy, both of its fundamentals and contradictions.

If we look, in fact, to the history of our participation to WEU, we can fix some of the basic characteristics of this interplay between continuity and contradictions:

- Italy's picture emerges as the one of a medium size power having played the role of "founder" for all European Institutions (including the WEU), but at the same time with a clear fear of remaining "excluded" from any new initiative launched by the Franco-German duo;
- Italy in the defence and security field is a strong and convinced advocate of an European autonomous initiative in building a defence Community, but at the same time it is more than others dependent from the American influence on the Continent;
- Italy advances a specific security interest in the Mediterranean and plays occasionally a rather important role in it, but at the same time it hasn't the strength of convincing its

¹Alexander Kelle, *Italianische Sicherheitspolitik 1949-1988*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt, 1997.

European partners to provide the necessary cover to its action in the Region, where it remains compressed between the conflicting American and French national interests.

If these are the contradictions of the past, there is also no doubt that, today, the future of Europe in the field of security and defense is destined to play even a more significant role in Italy because of the past few years' profound changes affecting the country's geopolitical and geostrategic situation². With the end of the Cold War, Italy has rapidly become a complete frontier country, due to the addition of the Eastern front to the traditional Southern one. Italy stands at the crossroads of two of the most crucial crisis areas in Europe: the Balkans and the Mediterranean.

At the same time, Italy has also recently recognized in the Albanian case the diminished security coverage offered by the traditional international organizations: the UN, NATO, OSCE and the European Union (EU).

The greater external security exposure, accompanied by a weaker multilateral coverage, has forced Italy to revise its security policy options in both the domestic and European perspective. The search for a more credible and effective alternative in military terms, whether it be NATO, CFSP (the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union) or the WEU, is becoming a vital political concern.³

Even today, then, the WEU represents one of the possible options for Italy, but this is not to say it is the dominant one.

1. The Major Foreign Policy Choices in the Post-War Period

There is an abundance of literature that considers Italian foreign policy since the end of World War II to be the fruit of two fundamental choices: its staunch fidelity to the project of European integration (the ECSC in 1952, and the EEC since 1957) and its membership in the Atlantic Alliance. Once Italy took these steps, for almost 30 years it ceased raising questions of different or added choices with respect to these two key pillars of its foreign policy. Italy has followed with great constancy, but also with a certain measure of passivity, the great debates which have accompanied the vicissitudes of the Atlantic Alliance and the European Community, always siding with the proponents of the most orthodox views.

This attitude, which continued almost uninterruptedly until the early 1980s, was born of the historical reasons which had dictated Italy's choices in the post-war period and of its particular domestic political situation.

²Cesare Merlini, "European Security from the Italian Perspective", *The International Spectator*, n. 2, April-June 1996, pp.61-74.

³Gianni Bonvicini, "Regional Reassertion: The Dilemmas of Italy", in Christopher Hill, ed., *The Actors in Europe's Foreign Policy*, Routledge, London, 1996, pp. 90-107.

In essence, the strategy of the post-war government headed by Alcide De Gasperi centered around the following objectives:

- to rejoin the ranks of the nations of Western Europe and the desire to sit at the same table with those who count (also in order to overcome the status of defeated country); this desire is one of the constants of Italian foreign policy and the source of attitudes of frustration/reaction which have distinguished many of our actions (the so-called "non-exclusion principle");⁴
- to thwart domestic debate on foreign policy, particularly on security matters; in effect, a "national" foreign policy floating free of the mighty anchor of the emerging Western Multilateral System could become a source of serious domestic instability; this because of Italy's still vivid nationalistic past and the presence of an anti-West Communist Party (an attitude, at the outset, also shared by the Socialist Party); in other words, De Gasperi wanted to be free to get on with the task of the country's economic reconstruction without having to deal with the added problem of foreign policy and security (from this standpoint, NATO was also an excellent cover to justify the maintenance and reconstruction of the Italian army);
- to erect an insurmountable ideological barrier against the Communist opposition; in political terms, Italy's anchorage to the West acted simultaneously as an obstacle to the ambitions of the Communist left to assert itself as a credible government alternative with respect to the Christian Democrats and the moderate left (the Socialists from the 1960s) and as an irresistible lure for the Communists to seek to justify their democratic "legitimation" and to be able to participate, albeit indirectly, in governing the country (the "national solidarity" government of the late 1970s).

But another fundamental reason underlies De Gasperi's choice: his unwavering faith in the process of European political integration as the only true antidote to the nationalist policies that had wrought so much damage in Italy and throughout Europe.

2. The Vicissitudes of the European Defence Community (EDC) and the "non-alternative" represented by the WEU

De Gasperi's full support to the first European defense project (the EDC, 1952) and his disappointment at its shelving by the French Parliament stemmed from this conviction.

⁴Stefano Silvestri, "Atlantic Defence and European Security in the Sphere of East-West Relations", *The International Spectator*, n. 1, January-March 1985, pp. 34-45.

Advised in those years by Altiero Spinelli, leader of the then rather influential Italian Federalists, De Gasperi was able to:

- a) overcome the misgivings of the Italian armed forces⁵, who were reluctant to join with the armies of the other EDC countries they had fought against (the French) or from whom they had separated (the Germans) and
- b) skirt the strong Communist (and Socialist) opposition by promoting an initiative to add to the original EDC a political dimension represented by the project of an European Political Community (EPC): the famous article 38 of the EDC Treaty, which established an ad hoc Assembly to draft the political section of the Treaty itself. This pro-federalist approach was to be a constant in Italy's European policy for many years to come. An ideological factor that responded also to the deepest Italian national interest. This idea of a Political Union almost always came to the fore whenever questions relative to the definition of a common security and defense policy were on the agenda.

Among other things, the disappointing experience of the EDC opened the chapter on Italy's European policy involving difficult relations with France, precisely over the crucial questions of common defense. In particular, fundamental divergences arose over NATO, where the French wanted to get distance from US, but also over the European security initiatives following the fall of the EDC. Notable among the Franco-Italian disagreements were those regarding the Fouchet plan (1961-63), when the Italians sided with the Benelux countries in defense of European orthodoxy and good relations with Washington and, in 1981 and 1983, when the French opposed to a strong pro-Community version of the Gensher-Colombo plan (see below). These suspicions and misunderstandings have carried over to the present days.

It must finally be observed that the Italian debate on European security is wholly unrelated to the role of the WEU in its first three decades. The 1954 decision to renew the Treaty of Brussels as a substitute for the defunct EDC has left barely a trace in the annals of Italian foreign policy. "Sleeping Beauty"⁶, as the WEU was scornfully termed, did not represent a feasible alternative to the EDC in Italy's European outlook, and there was no apparent opposition to its immediate and substantial "depletion", transferring to NATO all its competences and operational programs. Consequently, in the years that followed attention was entirely focused on NATO. In domestic politics the camps divided into pro-Americans (supporters of NATO) and anti-Americans. No one dreamed of taking up sides for or against the WEU!

⁵B. Incisa di Camerana, "Italia ed Europa: un punto di vista militare", *Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali*, n. 1, Gennaio-Marzo 1997, pp. 85-97.

⁶Carlo Jean, "Difesa Comune? Teniamoci la Nato", *Limes*, n. 4/93, pp. 53-64.

The only real significance attributed to the WEU was that of "playing" the British card within Europe⁷. In fact, the presence of Great Britain in the WEU was a good argument for proponents of enlarging the EC to admit the United Kingdom, in opposition to the Gaullist policy of France. One of the major champion of the enlarged EC was, rather unexpectedly, Altiero Spinelli, one of Italy's greatest Europeanist. Some time after being nominated Commissioner in Brussels in 1970, Spinelli decided to appoint, in the face of total opposition from his own colleagues, a British head of cabinet. The "Trojan horse" evoked by the Gaullists was transformed, in the Italian vision, into a valuable ally to thwart French attempts to impose its own leadership and to reinforce an "Atlantic" vision of Europe, the only way to overcome Washington's misgivings regarding greater European autonomy in the field of security. Despite the many delusions Great Britain would give Italy on European integration issues, and on which an authentic Anglo-Italian alliance was never able to take wing, this fundamental idea, as we will see, was to be revived in 1991 precisely in regard to the WEU and its relations with the European Union.

3. The Development of European Political Cooperation (EPC) and European Security Policy

With the WEU shunted aside to await revitalization at the propitious moment, which no one then was able to foresee, Italy followed other avenues to contribute to strengthening European security policies (in those days no one spoke of common defense.)

The first avenue involved adding a security dimension to the EPC, which was founded in 1970. For a variety of reasons, Italy deemed the exercise of foreign policy within the EPC to be of capital significance:

- on one side, this completed the Italian ideological blueprint, which viewed the addition of a political dimension to economic integration as completing the journey towards European unification;
- on the other, this furnished good coverage for Italian foreign policy, especially in very delicate areas such as the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

The initiative in 1981 of the Italian Foreign Minister Emilio Colombo and his German counterpart Dietrich Gensher to add security policy to the EPC, completing the British initiative of October of that same year (the London Report) sprang from this fundamental conviction. But, unlike the British, the two foreign ministers wanted to attempt to "communitarize" the EPC, also in terms of the new security aspects just decided in London. The operation failed, not only because of the expected British opposition, but also because of French reluctance to support an initiative which did not cast France as the key player and which, in any case, strayed too far from France's "autonomist" vision of security matters.

⁷Bino Olivi, *L'Europa Difficile*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1995.

The Solemn Declaration of Stuttgart which followed in June 1983 catalogued these obstacles and wound up a partial failure⁸.

The second avenue, pursued essentially by Italian political forces, involved supporting Altiero Spinelli, who had become a member of the European Parliament in the ranks of the Italian Communist Party, in favor of a strong initiative to revise the Treaty of Rome. Approved by a wide majority in February 1984, the "New Treaty" of the European Parliament openly took up the problem of European defense. European defense became a competence of the Union, without passing through the WEU, and stood as one of the most innovative aspects of the parliamentary project. Although the New Treaty remained a dead letter, it must be recognized for having clearly asserted the issue of common defense.

These two initiatives, conceived in the early 1980s and conducted concurrently, one at the government level, the other within the European Parliament, were important for having openly faced the problem emerging in those years relative to the role of the European Community in the field of security. This is the period of maturation of what might be called the "European syndrome", Europe's seeing itself as simultaneously the subject and the object of international security policy. These were the years in which the Euromissiles were deployed, parallel to the opening of talks between the USA and the USSR on an INF Treaty. Europe, which had made the difficult decision to accept the Euromissiles on its soil, felt excluded from the Moscow-Washington dialogue and sought the means to reassert itself.

4. Towards Revitalization of the WEU

From this state of affairs came the thrust to revitalize the WEU, with Italy in the forefront. President of the Council Bettino Craxi and Defense Minister Giovanni Spadolini played most of their European cards to achieve this. It was no coincidence that the meeting of the WEU Council to propose its revival was held in Rome (October 26-27, 1984).

Italy's commitment to this cause continued in the following years, from its contribution to drafting the WEU Platform (1987) to negotiations with the British in 1991 to insert this document into the Treaty of Maastricht.

There were various reasons for Italy's about-face on the WEU, an institution which until then, as we have noted, had never really found a place in Italy's political debate.

a) Italy's Growing Role in Foreign Policy and Security Matters and the Urgent Need to Find Better Multilateral Coverage.

⁸Gianni Bonvicini, "The Genscher-Colombo Plan and the Solemn Declaration on European Union", in Roy Pryce, ed., *The Dynamics of European Union*, Tepsa, Croom Helm, Kent, 1987, pp. 174-187.

The early 1980s were marked by what has been labelled "an emerging profile of Italian foreign policy"⁹. Without explicitly announcing a new foreign policy strategy, Italy began to sort out of the state of passivity it had consciously adopted in the post-war period in the wake of its two key choices, NATO and the EC. The new commitments regarded, in particular, the Mediterranean and the Middle East, from the 1981 Treaty on Malta's neutrality to participation in the Sinai peacekeeping operation, from missions in Lebanon to the interventions to sweep mines from the Red Sea and the naval control of the Persian Gulf¹⁰.

It must be noted that Italy also showed a strong commitment on the European front. The most important action involved approving the deployment of 120 Cruise missiles at Comiso in 1983, a decision which paved the way for the analogous choice by the German Bundestag. This meant the effective deployment of Euromissiles in Western Europe¹¹.

If, on one side, these various actions helped Italy rediscover a certain measure of freedom in national foreign policy, on the other, they forced Italy to reassess the role of Europe in providing the necessary international security coverage, particularly in out-of-area operations, in which NATO seemed to lack competence, while the WEU, theoretically, faced no obstacles.

Of course, this debate was conducted largely on paper, since the WEU still lacked the possibility of becoming operative, at least until the Petersberg agreement in 1992.

b) Relations With the USA in the Mediterranean.

Our increasing role in the Mediterranean soon came into conflict with Washington's policy in the region. Aside from Washington's conduct in the Middle East, on which there already existed a broad critical European front (European Council, Venice, 1980), Italy found itself enmeshed in the thorny Libyan question, on which agreement with Washington has proved futile.

The first American bombardment of Tripoli in 1984 found Italy exposed on the front line, and a European Community reply seemed impossible, due to the lack of competences in the security field. Therefore, it was precisely this want of European coverage that forced Italy to endorse every initiative that might help build greater European security, including revival of the WEU. In the Mediterranean the overwhelming American presence could not be challenged without the backing of Europe.

⁹Roberto Aliboni, "Italy and the New International Context: An Emerging Foreign Policy Profile", *The International Spectator*, n. 1, January-March 1985, pp. 1-18.

¹⁰Umberto Capuzzo, "The New Italian Perception of Security", *The International Spectator*, n. 3/4 1984, pp. 133-136.

¹¹Maurizio Cremasco, "European Security in Italian Politics", *Iai Doc*, n. 84/33, 1984.

c) Fear of the Rise of an Extra-WEU "Directoire".

As early as 1984, at the time of the WEU's revival, Defense Minister Spadolini expressed in a memorandum the need to elude the perils of a Franco-Anglo-German "directoire" on European security and arms cooperation matters, a kind of trilateral "core" of a future military set up in Europe¹². In the following years this risk disappeared and the Italian fear focused rather on the birth of a bilateral Franco-German "directoire". This factor also worked in favor of revitalizing Europe. On 19 June 1987, the announcement of implementation of the clauses in the Elysée Treaty regarding military cooperation between France and Germany triggered acute concern in Italian political and, even more, military circles, which, since the creation of the Franco-German Brigade saw the tangible threat of a "directoire" looming in the defense field.

As we will see, the question of the "directoire" was to become even more crucial in recent times. But even then it provoked what we might term a "conditioned reflex" of Italian foreign policy: the attempt to "communitarize" the emerging extra-Community initiatives of the Franco-German duo. The alternative was to attempt to counteract the problem relying on the British and to ally with them. Based on this line of reasoning, at that time the preferable alternative was to strengthen the WEU and have it assimilate the Franco-German military agreement.

d) Failure of the Previous Community Initiatives; Slow Developments Within the Community and Search for a More Quick Alternative.

These considerations certainly played a role in the attempt, not only by Italy but also by the majority of our European partners, to bank on reviving the WEU rather than await the maturation of a Community security and defense project, which seemed quite remote. In fact the maximum achievable on the European level was inclusion of art. 30 in the 1986 Single European Act, which yet again made mention of only the political and economic aspects of security (with a sharp exclusion of any military dimension). So, for Italy, as well, the WEU alternative represented an authentic short-cut to overcoming the objections of reluctant Community partners (Ireland and Denmark) and to launching effectively the debate on European defense¹³.

e) Agreement among the Italian Political Forces on the European Option.

It must finally be observed that betting certain cards on Europe rather than placing them all on NATO responded to certain necessities of Italian domestic policy. Europe was the issue

¹²Istèvene Gaïas, "Security in Europe: Reactivation of the Weu and the Process of European Integration", *The International Spectator*, n. 3/4, July-December 1985, pp. 27-33.

¹³Stefano Silvestri et alia, "European Defence and Security in Europe", *The International Spectator*, Special Issue, n. 2, April-June 1988.

that had brought the Communists close to the area of government, so that in 1977 a parliamentary motion on foreign and European policy was approved in common by the government parties and the Communists, showing a kind of bipartisan attitude on European issues.

This led directly to the establishment of the national solidarity government, with the Communists being part of the parliamentary majority, but still excluded from the government. This pro-European approach by the Communists, albeit with certain temporary interruptions when Italy joined the European Monetary System (EMS) in 1979, had helped make Italian foreign policy very stable. In fact, even on divisive issues such as the deployment of the Euromissiles in 1983, the Communist opposition proved much softer than expected¹⁴. Adopting a more emphatic European approach on international security questions also aided the strategy of progressive rapprochement among the Italian political forces.

5. Relations With WEU, NATO and the EU on the Eve of Maastricht

The support accorded the WEU was expressed in every phase of the negotiations which preceded the opening of the Conference on the Treaty of Maastricht (1990-91). Some few months before, the Italian position underwent an apparent change of course from its habitual Community orthodoxy: leading Italian politicians and diplomats, in fact, did approach the United Kingdom at the climax of the debate on the place of the WEU within the nascent European Union.

It is widely known that this still open question regards relations between WEU and EU on one side and WEU and NATO on the other¹⁵. More precisely, the question revolves around whether the WEU should become part of the EU or occupy an autonomous position with respect to it. It is just as widely known that the British have taken a stand in favor of the latter option. On 4 October 1991, on the eve of the European Council of Maastricht, Italy and the United Kingdom signed a joint declaration founded on recognition of the special relationship between Western Europe and North America, a relationship which found its true expression in the Atlantic Alliance as the "key element of European identity"¹⁶. The reform of NATO and the development of a European defense identity were termed "complementary". The WEU was to be assigned the task of developing the European dimension in the field of defense, in other words, the "defense" component of the political Union, as well as the European pillar of the Alliance. The WEU would have to take into

¹⁴Yanni Valinakis, "Italian Security Concerns and Policy", *The International Spectator*, n. 2, April-June 1984, pp. 110-114.

¹⁵Giulio Andreotti, "La sicurezza dell'Europa", *Affari Esteri*, n. 77, Inverno 1988, pp. 3-11.

¹⁶Willem Van Ekel, "Il programma dell'Ueu dopo Maastricht", *Notizie Nato*, Aprile 1992, pp. 13-17.

account the decisions of both the Council of Europe and the Alliance. In short, the WEU was to act as a "bridge".

In opposition to the Anglo-Italian stance, a letter signed by Mitterand and Kohl on 14 October 1991 reiterated the vocation of the WEU to become part of the EU. The Franco-German letter called for creation of an organic linkage between the European Union and the WEU through close cooperation and, in certain areas, a merger of the two institutions. With regard to cooperation between the Atlantic Alliance and the WEU, this was to be developed on the basis of the statement issued by the Atlantic Council in June 1991 in Copenhagen and of the dual principle of transparency and complementarity.

The Italian move took its Community partners somewhat by surprise, since it contrasted with Italy's oft-expressed integrationist policy. The actual scope of the Italian move was to win the British over to the formulation expressed in the Treaty of Maastricht, in which both positions are present, although, in terms of wording, the Franco-German formulation of the WEU as an "integral part of the EU" prevails. The truth is that the WEU has continued to live autonomously even after ratification of the Treaty of Maastricht, and at the eve of Amsterdam Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) the problem has re-emerged in its entirety.

The reasons behind the Italian position can be traced back to the old fear of once more being crushed by Franco-German dominance¹⁷. This suspicion was fanned by the decision of Bonn and Paris to transform the bilateral Brigade into a Corps, to be called the "Eurocorps", to signify its openness to accepting other members, but whose bilateral character remained preeminent.

Logically speaking, Italy should have remained true to its longstanding philosophy, which was to "communitarize" the bilateral agreement between Germany and France and stand as a link for a broad coalition of states anxious to achieve the same objective. From this standpoint, agreement with the British, notoriously opposed to any form of "communitarization", caused this type of reasoning to lose all credibility. So the Italian move was actually governed more by the fear of Franco-German dominance than by Community logic¹⁸. So much so that, in the following months, the Italian government refused the invitations of France and Germany to join the Eurocorps. In numerous circles, particularly those close to Italy's defense establishment, the greatest apprehension was over French dominance: the demand to create a "star-shaped structure" in the defense sector, with France always at its center¹⁹.

6. Italian Foreign Policy and the WEU After Maastricht

¹⁷Gianni De Michelis, "La vera storia di Maastricht", *Limes*, n. 3/96, pp. 137-144.

¹⁸Andrea Cagiati, "L'identità difensiva europea", *Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali*, n. 3, Luglio-Settembre 1992, pp. 347-356.

¹⁹Marco Baccin, "Le prospettive dell'Ueo", *Affari Esteri*, n. 80, Autunno 1988, pp. 603-614.

The period between the coming into effect of the Treaty of Maastricht and preparation of the new Intergovernmental Conference, which opened the 16th of June 1997 in Amsterdam, has been distinguished by a series of extraordinary events for Italian foreign policy and equally sweeping consequences for the way security issues are dealt with.

Compared to the past, the most relevant aspect certainly involves the experimentation with a period of partial marginalization of Italy from the European and international scene. The first signs of difficulty were manifested over monetary issues, with Italy's withdrawal from the EMS in the summer of 1992 and the belated discovery of a huge public debt which moved Italy farther away from respect of the Maastricht macroeconomic convergence criteria necessary to participate in the Euro. But unexpected consequences of exclusion or self-exclusion also emerged in other sectors. In the soft security sector, with the difficulties of entering into the border agreement signed in Schengen in 1990 by Italy's principal historical partners in Europe (the matter will be finally solved in October 1997). In the political security sector, with Italy's exclusion from the Contact Group on Bosnia in early 1994. And, finally, the isolated position Italy found itself occupying vis-à-vis the Americans and the Germans on the question of reforming the Security Council (Germans being partners of vital importance both for the Euro and for development of the political pillar of European Union, including the security aspects)²⁰.

The feeling of being less indispensable than in the past was confirmed by the facts and led Italy to pursue, at times alone or even in contrast with its European partners (like in the case of the reforming of the Security Council), solutions that would protect it from further harm in the foreign policy and security arena. Once again, the "principle of non-exclusion" was triggered as Italy sought to keep from being ostracized from further initiatives, particularly those on the European chessboard. This is the key to understanding the current government's obsession with participating in the Euro, whatever the cost, seeing this as a credit card to permit participation in other European initiatives in sectors beyond the economic arena.

These external difficulties were accompanied by a period of profound transformation in domestic politics. In only a few years' time, the government shifted from center-right (Berlusconi) to center-left (Prodi). Fluctuations and revisions in foreign and security policy were a consequence. Above all, the tangible risk of marginalization combined with the domestic political disquiet led some of the basic assumptions of our foreign policy to be questioned.

In fact, if the multilateral framework continues to be considered the best way of serving Italian national interests, the perception of a certain marginalization could foster the emergence of unilateral positions. In the near future we might witness the emergence of demands which contrast with both Italy's original integrationist motives in the EU and the firm preference for a multilateral approach in foreign policy. The combination of European

²⁰Gianni Bonvicini et Alia, eds., *Italia senza Europa? Il costo della non-partecipazione alle politiche dell'Unione Europea*, Collana Lo Spettatore Internazionale, Angeli Editore, Milano, 1997.

and Italian internal crises has, in fact, helped midwife the birth of new kinds of political tendencies²¹:

a) neo-mercantilist. Proponents of this approach still have in mind the relative advantage for a trade policy with the competitive devaluation of the lira. They continue to oppose Maastricht's macroeconomic convergence criteria. Supporters of this tendency cut across political lines and numerous sectors of small- and medium-size enterprises.

b) neo-nationalist. This approach emphasizes the geopolitical interests of Italy and re-opens some of the disputed issues of the past, for example, that of the Italian minorities in Slovenia and Croatia. Proponents of this tendency include right-wing political forces and certain prominent intellectual circles.

c) neo-neutralist. Advocates of this approach would like to see a minor engagement of Italy in the Western camp, favoring, instead, a full assignment of authority to the UN. Supporters of this idea belong to the Refounded Communist Party.

The common elements of these three approaches include a policy for Italy's progressive disengagement from Europe and support for greater autonomy in international affairs, including the security field. For the time being, these positions do not represent real alternatives to Italy's traditional attachment to the EU, but if European interests were perceived to clash with Italy's vital interests, they could gain strength.

The European option was also weakened by the WEU's scant success in managing the crisis in the former Yugoslavia. The operation got off to a good start following speedy approval of the WEU's operational tasks in Petersberg in the fall of 1992, combined with hopes for an effective revival of the WEU as the armed division of an EU able to impart political directives. But the degeneration of the Bosnian conflict soon revealed the limits of the WEU, which lacked the power to achieve more than the naval control of the Adriatic and the Danube and the reorganization of the police forces in Mostar.

Once again the question of the WEU's place within either NATO or the EU was opened, to the progressive detriment of the latter hypothesis. The 1996 agreement on the CJTF signed in Berlin did nothing to increase the chances for the WEU's integration into the EU. Interpretations of this agreement are widely divergent. Some consider it the starting point for a more autonomous role for Europe; others, on the contrary, see it marking the end of Europe's role, since every decision on the responsibility to be assigned to Europe in the security field depends on the political will of the Atlantic Alliance²².

²¹Cesare Merlini, "Six Proposals for Italian Foreign Policy", *The International Spectator*, n. 3, July-September 1993, pp. 5-20.

²²Andrea Cagiati, "L'Europa nella Nato", *Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali*, n. 3, Luglio-Settembre 1996, pp. 337-341.

Recently, Italy has directly experienced the disappointments growing out of the scant operational effectiveness of the WEU. In meeting the challenge of the Albanian crisis and deciding the peacekeeping intervention, the WEU option rapidly dissolved as a tangible possibility. The hostile stand of Germany to military engagement in Albania has removed almost entirely the European coverage of the military mission. Paradoxically, Italy was forced to turn to France, utilizing Eurofor and Euromar, the two initiatives parallel to the Eurocorps that were conceived in 1995.

7. Towards the Merge of the WEU into the European Union? The negative Answer from the Amsterdam Conference and Consequences on the Position of Italy

One might have thought that the emergence of greater skepticism in Italy on the WEU's capacity to shoulder the burden of European military operations should have shifted the country farther away from its past integrationist attitudes and, in view of Amsterdam, made it more prudent on the subject of strengthening this institution²³.

In reality, with a government fully engaged to regain Country's lost credibility and process of marginalisation from Europe, the chances for a less pro-integrationist policy in the security field were rather nonexistent. The poor performance of WEU and its institutional inconsistency did not represent a good argument to be used against its reinforcement.

On the contrary, in view of the Intergovernmental Conference in Amsterdam, the combination of these mutually contradictory factors has led Italy once again to follow tradition in favor of strengthening European defense institutions, backing, in this case, the strongest option.

Italy had therefore decided to support a joint document of the six founding states of the European Community, together with Spain. This document, presented at the ministerial meeting in Rome on 25 March 1997, was calling for a three-phases plan for the progressive absorption of the WEU into the EU and had to be approved by the other European partners in Amsterdam²⁴. The key passage for the credibility of this plan was that of deciding the final date for its implementation. But in order to avoid a crossfire on it from the very beginning, the duration of the entire transition phase was left blank in the document. Only at the eve of Amsterdam the Presidency, with the agreement of the other proponents, suggested to fix at least the deadline for the first phase, five year, as foreseen by art.N on Treaties revision.

²³Carlo Jean, "L'Italia e la difesa comune europea", *Affari Esteri*, n. 110, Aprile 1996, pp. 296-308.

²⁴ "Document on Article J.\$ to the Treaty on European Union", Document, CONF 3855/97, March 24, 1997.

Having Italy adopted this advanced position, it is clear that, unlike on the eve of Maastricht, there was no margin nor temptation for any kind of mediation or compromise with the United Kingdom. The only viable road was that of endorsing wholeheartedly the desire expressed, until then, of France and Germany to absorb the WEU into the Union. In addition, Italy called for a certain measure of "communitarization" of European defense policy. The proposal to have the WEU "disappear" might have furthered a gradual shift in this direction.

Unfortunately in Amsterdam the worst possible scenario took place. A weak Dutch Presidency willing to close at any cost the IGC in time and an ambiguous German position on the real necessity to reinforce the political pillar of the Union (as Germany was declaring in the previous months) left Italy completely isolated in fighting the battle for the institutional upgrading of WEU and the Defence Pillar of the Union. Not even the mention to the five year deadline for the revision of art. J.7 on the Defence tasks of the Union appeared in the final text, nor any suggestion to further "communitarise" European security policy was accepted.

The collapse of the "European spirit" in Amsterdam and the defeat of the strong institutional option has created a degree of embarrassment in the political and diplomatic circles of Italy. The temptation to move away from the traditional path of Europe regained again some support inside the government and in the opposition. But a nationalistic option is not yet there.

Italy still senses acutely the real risk that the absence of strong European institutions might generate trends towards new "directoires" to meet the proliferation of local crises in Europe and the Mediterranean. The fact of belonging to a "directoire" of Southern European countries in the Mediterranean to deal, even if successfully, with the Albanian crisis is not an attractive prospect for Italy, since it could spell Italy's exclusion from the "directoires" that might be established in Central Europe. This would also leave France completely free to advance the "stellar" policy Italy has so often opposed (only to contradict itself by agreeing to participate in Eurofor and Euromar, thereby making them operative for the military campaign in Albania, as noted above).

In addition, antagonism with France persists over the NATO Afsouth command. Italy is, at least tactically, in contrast with its own pro-Europe policy, since it has sided more with the American positions than with those of France and Germany.

At the same time, it is certainly inopportune for Italy to act in concert with the United States in the Mediterranean, since Italy has no chance at all of being able to influence the design or control of American policies and actions in the region.

For a weak country like Italy, still experiencing a period of humiliating marginalisation, the persistence of a strong multilateral system represents still the only real guarantee against the risk of exclusion. We know also very well how much disruptive the exclusion from Europe can be internally. An equation between exclusion and secession (or internal disruption), as proposed by the Northern League, is easy to be drawn. Therefore the only credible option remains the old strategy towards Europe. The effort to be part of the Euro is certainly in line with that strategy. It represents the only way out from the past marginalisation at European and international level and responds a deep Italian national interest.

Once again, it seems that the only foreign policy strategy for Italy is to bank on the Community option rather than face the situation of uncertainty and crisis it has had to experience the past few years in regard to its foreign and security policy. The WEU is certainly not, for the time being, the primary objective of this action but, rather, a European Union in full control of its common security and defense policy. But in order to get that, and this is more clear today after Amsterdam, first it has to move through the doors of the full Economic and Monetary Integration. The rest might follow.