



ITALY'S EUROPEAN POLICY¹

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Abstract:

After the Second World War Italy's international position was very weak, sharply contrasting her aspirations. For a few years, Italy's European choice was largely influenced by the belief that it would strengthen Italy's international status and would favour the revision of the peace treaty. Such a choice was also part of a wider Western alignment which would offer the Italian moderate political forces a further boost to impose themselves as the leaders of the country and to win the harsh contest with the powerful forces of the Left. The real turning point in Italy's European choice was the emerging functionalist approach advocated by Monnet, and the launching of the Schuman Plan in 1950. While Italy was sceptical of the EDC, she could not contradict her Europeanist commitment. Therefore in 1951, Prime Minister De Gasperi launched an ambitious scheme for a European Political Community. This period can be regarded as the climax in both De Gasperi's and Italy's federalist choice. Through the participation to the EEC, Italy experienced a process of economic and social modernization that contributed to the radical transformation of the country. Later, in spite of these achievements, Italy's position in the integration process was severely hampered by her internal political and social crisis and by the mid-70s she was perceived as one of the weakest links in the Western European system. In the 1980s Italy experienced a period of apparent economic recovery, political stability and social modernization. The period between 1992 and 1996 was characterised by a series of weak governments having as a main goal the recovery of the Italian economic and financial system to comply with the demanding economic clauses of the Maastricht Treaty. In this connection, Italy's faithfulness to the European integration was a vital factor as the country's future was closely tied to the EU and its developments. The majority of the Italian public opinion was mobilized through the catchword of "Italy must join Europe", but some forms of euro-scepticism began to surface in the centre-right parties. The European choice is still a paramount aspect of Italy's foreign policy and the country's international role is still linked to the developments in the European construction.

Keywords: EEC, EDC, EU, Italian Europeanism.

¹ The present article is a synthesis of a recent volume in which the author has dealt with Italy's European choice; see Varsori, Antonio (2010): *La Cenerentola d'Europa? L'Italia e l'integrazione europea dal 1947 a oggi*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino. See also Craveri, Piero and Varsori, Antonio (eds.) (2009): *L'Italia nella costruzione europea. Un bilancio storico (1957-2007)*, Milan, Franco Angeli.

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**Resumen:**

Tras la 2ª Guerra Mundial la posición internacional de Italia era muy débil, en marcado contraste con sus aspiraciones. Durante unos cuantos años, la elección europea de Italia se vio influida por la idea de que ello reforzaría el estatus internacional de Italia y favorecería la revisión de un tratado de paz. Tal elección se enmarcaba igualmente en un alineamiento más amplio con Occidente, lo cual ayudaría a que las fuerzas moderadas italianas se impusiesen como líderes del país ganando la partida a las fuerzas de la izquierda. El verdadero punto de inflexión en la apuesta pro-europea de Italia llegó con el enfoque propugnado por Monet y el lanzamiento del Plan Shuman en 1950. Si bien Italia era escéptica de la CED, no podía en todo caso contradecir sus compromisos europeístas, de manera que en 1951 el primer ministro de Gasperi lanzó un ambicioso proyecto de Comunidad Política Europea. Este periodo puede verse como el clímax de la apuesta tanto de Gasperi como de Italia misma por el federalismo. Por su participación en la CEE, Italia experimentó un proceso de modernización económica y social que contribuyó a una transformación radical del país. Más tarde, a pesar de tales logros, la posición de Italia en el proceso de integración se vio muy dificultado por la crisis social y política, y a mediados de los años 70 era percibida como uno de los miembros más débiles del sistema europeo occidental. En la década de los 80, Italia gozó de un proceso de aparente recuperación económica, estabilidad política y modernización social. El periodo desde 1992 a 1996 se caracterizó por una serie de gobiernos débiles cuyo principal objetivo era la recuperación del sistema económico y financiero con el fin de lograr cumplir con las exigentes cláusulas económicas del Tratado de Maastricht. En relación con ello, la fidelidad de Italia a la integración europea fue un factor vital ya que el país estaba ligado muy estrechamente a la UE y sus logros. La mayoría de la opinión pública italiana se movilizó detrás del lema "Italia debe unirse a Europa", pero ciertas formas de euro-escepticismo empezaron a emerger en el seno de los partidos de centro-derecha. La apuesta europea de Italia sigue siendo un aspecto vital en su política exterior y en su proyección internacional, y se mantiene ligada a los éxitos de la construcción europea

Palabras clave: CEE, CED, UE, Europeísmo italiano.

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1. The Origins of Italy's European Choice: a Matter of Prestige?

On June 1947 the Italian Government led by Alcide De Gasperi immediately joined the project for the reconstruction of the European economy that the US Secretary of State George C. Marshall had sketched out in his speech delivered at the Harvard University. In his positive reaction to the US initiative the Italian Foreign Minister Count Carlo Sforza, a former diplomat and politician of the pre-fascist period, pointed out that Italy gave a positive evaluation of the American pro-Europeanist stand, moreover he pointed out that Italy would participate to the European project on the condition of being recognised a status of perfect equality with the other participants. Italy's reaction to the Marshall Plan appears to sum up the main characters of the nation's early position towards the launching of the European integration process.

In the aftermath of the Second World War Italy's international position was a very weak, almost a desperate one. Although in summer 1943 Mussolini had been overthrown and the Badoglio Government with the support of King Victor Emmanuel III had been able to disengage the country from the alliance with Nazi Germany and in October, owing to the declaration of war to the German Reich, Italy had achieved the status of a co-belligerent nation, Italy was perceived by the major victorious powers as a defeated enemy country. During the negotiations that would lead to the drafting of the Italian peace treaty, a punitive approach had prevailed and in February 1947, when the Italian representative had signed in Paris the treaty, the Italian Government had been compelled to accept a sort of "diktat". On the basis of the peace treaty provisions Italy had been obliged to accept a series of territorial losses: from the Dalmatian territories to the Istria peninsula, from some minor areas along the border with France to the African colonies, to the Dodecanese islands. Moreover Italy would be compelled to pay heavy reparations to some victorious nations, especially the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, and would be subject to severe limitations, as far as its military apparatus was concerned. When the Marshall Plan had been launched, the peace treaty's ratification process had not yet been completed and, at least in theory Italy was still subject to the armistice terms and foreign occupation troops would leave the country only in November 1947³.

Italy's international status sharply contrasted with the aspirations nurtured by the Italian anti-Fascist political class, by the diplomatic corps and by most Italian opinion-makers. In their opinion Italy had to recover the role of a middle-rank power, which could exert its influence in the two traditional areas of Italy's foreign policy: the European continent and an "enlarged Mediterranean", that could be widened to some part of the Middle East and Africa. In this connection the rapid revision of the most severe clauses of the peace treaty and the recognition of the nation's international status were the main goals of Italy's foreign policy; moreover, although the United States were regarded by the Italian moderate pro-Western political class as the most obvious and powerful ally, it was easily recognised that Italy's international role mainly meant the achievement of a status of equality with Italy's traditional European partners, that in the immediate post-war period meant Britain and France⁴. So De Gasperi's and Sforza's almost enthusiastic reaction to the Marshall Plan is not surprising, as for the first time after the end of the Second World War, in July 1947, Italy could join the

³ For a general assessment of Italy's attitude towards the peace treaty see Lorenzini, Sara (2007): *L'Italia e il trattato di pace del 1947*, Bologna, il Mulino.

⁴ For an overall evaluation of Italy's International role see Romero, Federico and Varsori, Antonio (eds) (2005/2006): *Nazione, interdipendenza, integrazione. Le relazioni internazionali dell'Italia (1917-1989)*, 2 vols, Roma, Carocci.



Paris conference on the US project convened by France and Britain on a ground of formal parity with the other western European nations, which included two major victorious powers. The interpretation by most Italian decision-makers of the European choice as a useful instrument in order to achieve national, if not nationalist, goals did not exclude a real interest in the European ideal by influential sectors of Italy's political scenario⁵. During the wartime period numerous representatives of some anti-Fascist political forces, especially the Christian Democracy, the Liberal Party, the Action Party and the Socialist Party, in their programmes had dealt with the issue of Europe's future in the post-war international context. They had rejected the nationalist concepts of the Fascist period and had been aware of the moral and political crisis that Europe would have to face in the post-war period. Only the creation of a European federation would save the Old Continent from new wars, economic plights and moral decadence, as well as it would avoid the end of Europe's pivotal role in international affairs. In this context the Ventotene Manifesto, drafted in 1941, was just an example of such a tendency⁶.

Although the presence of strong Europeanist influences cannot be neglected, for a few years Italy's European choice was largely influenced by the belief that such an approach would strengthen Italy's international status and would favour the revision of the peace treaty. Furthermore such a choice was part of a wider Western choice, which would offer the Italian moderate political forces a further boost to impose themselves as the leaders of the country and to win the harsh contest with the powerful forces of the Left, especially the Italian Communist Party, which could profit from both the influential patriotic role it had played in the Resistance and from the strength of the Soviet Union and the international Communist movement.

In autumn 1947, in the wider context of the Marshall Plan negotiations, the French and the Italian Governments put forward the project for the creation of a French-Italian customs union. In spite of talks that would last for a long period, as well as of the signature of preliminary agreements, the plan was doomed to failure. In the late 1940s the project would involve also the three Benelux countries – the so-called FRITALUX/FINEBEL negotiations – but in the mid-1950s no concrete result would be achieved. In spite of this lack of any practical outcome, the project for a French-Italian customs union was regarded by the Italian authorities as a serious attempt at achieving some important result in the field of the European integration, as the Italian authorities hoped that the realization of the customs union would give Italy some economic advantage. However the interpretation of the European choice as a useful instrument in order to achieve a political and diplomatic success was not absent from the minds of Italian decision-makers, especially in the early stages of the negotiations. Through the creation of a customs union with France Italy would be recognised an equal status with one of the four victorious powers; moreover both Paris and Rome would please the US administration, so strengthening the position of both countries in the context of the Marshall Plan negotiations, as well as in the context of the transatlantic relationship⁷.

Actually, in spite of its involvement in the Marshall Plan and its being a founding member of the OEEC in 1948, Italy's position in the emerging western system was still very

⁵ On Italy and the Marshall Plan see the recent contribution: Campus, Mauro (2008): *L'Italia, gli Stati Uniti e il Piano Marshall*, Roma-Bari, Laterza.

⁶ See Pistone, Sergio (ed.) (1992): *I movimenti per l'unità europea 1945-1954*, Milano, Jaca Book; Spinelli, Altiero (1994): *Machiavelli nel secolo XX. Scritti dal confino e dalla clandestinità 1941-1944*, Bologna, il Mulino.

⁷ For a thoughtful analysis of this episode see Bagnato, Bruna (1995): *Storia di un'illusione europea. Il progetto di unione doganale italo-francese*, London, Lothian Foundation Press.



weak. Such an element had some relevant consequence on the Italian policy towards the European integration too in the immediate following years. When, in January 1948, Britain's Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin launched the proposal for a Western Union, Count Sforza showed some interest in the British project, although once again he pointed out Rome's aspiration at being recognised a status similar to the one enjoyed by the major Western European nations, i.e. Britain and France. In a few months Bevin's initiative would lead to the signature of the Brussels Pact, a political and military alliance that would include the UK, France and the Benelux nations. During the negotiations the project for a western European alliance had been labelled by the Italian parties of the left as a sort of "anti-Komintern" pact, so implying an anti-Soviet and aggressive character. In the heated atmosphere that characterised the first Italian electoral campaign De Gasperi feared that a premature Italian involvement in the five power talks would offer to the left parties a useful propaganda tool against the moderate coalition. So the Italian authorities decided to avoid any involvement in the future Brussels Pact. Moreover Italian political and diplomatic milieu was sceptical of any military alliance that would not include the US, the only real guarantee of the western European security. In May 1948, on the morrow of the April 1948 elections, which had marked the triumph of De Gasperi's Christian Democratic Party, the Italian Foreign Ministry thought that Italy now enjoyed a full US support and on the basis of such a wrong assumption some top Foreign Ministry officials hoped that Italy could bargain its adherence to the Brussels Pact. Palazzo Chigi – at that time the seat of the Italian Foreign Ministry – thought that it would be possible to achieve some concession from Britain on the issue of the former Italian colonies. The British Foreign Office rejected, almost with contempt, Rome's move. Moreover in that same period the major western powers were starting important negotiations which would lead to the creation of the Atlantic Alliance, the future main pillar of the western system⁸. Last but not least in the Autumn of 1948, owing to the initiatives promoted by European movements and as a consequence of the Congress of Europe held at the Hague in May, the five powers of the Brussels Treaty were going to initiate negotiations in order to create a "European assembly", the future Council of Europe⁹.

In an early stage the Italian political and diplomatic authorities had some difficulty in understanding what was going on in the emerging Western bloc, although they understood that Italy was risking to be marginalised by the "inner circle" of the western system. So the European integration appeared to Sforza and De Gasperi a useful instrument that would help Italy: in July 1948 Sforza held an important public speech in Perugia and he strongly advocated the transformation of the OEEC into a political body which would aim at the creation of a European union. Moreover he sent to the French government a memorandum in which he sketched out his plan. But the major western powers, France included, showed no interest whatsoever in the Italian proposal, as they were involved in the negotiations for the creation of a far more relevant Atlantic alliance. In October 1948 Sforza sent a further memorandum to the member states of the OEEC, but the reaction was at the best a lukewarm one¹⁰. Only in late 1948 the Italian leaders realised that the real issue at stake was the creation of the Atlantic Alliance: if Italy wished to be a member of the core of the western system, it had to be involved in this military alliance, although such a choice would be an impervious one, especially for domestic reasons related to the still uncertain Italian political balance. In spite of that, Britain, which opposed Italy's adherence to the Atlantic Pact, began to think that

⁸ On the issue of Italy's involvement in the Atlantic Alliance see the article in this issue by de Leonardis, Massimo: *Italy's Atlanticism between Foreign and Internal Politics*.

⁹ Varsori, Antonio (1988): *Il Patto di Bruxelles (1948): tra integrazione europea e alleanza atlantica*, Roma, Bonacci.

¹⁰ On Sforza's policy see Sforza, Carlo (1952): *Cinque anni a Palazzo Chigi. La politica estera italiana dal 1947 al 1951*, Roma, Atlante.



Italy could join the future Council of Europe, which in Whitehall was perceived as by far less relevant than the Atlantic alliance. In January 1949 the Italian government, which was strongly supported by France and some US State Department officials, put forward its candidature to the Atlantic Alliance. In spite of British continuing opposition, Italy was accepted as a founding member of the western military alliance; moreover the Italian authorities could take part to the final negotiations that, in May 1949, would lead to the signature of the London Treaty and to the setting up of the Council of Europe¹¹.

In spite of this official recognition which appeared to mark Italy's full involvement in the European integration process, the Italian authorities did not focus their interest on this aspect of the nation's foreign policy. During the second half of 1949 and early 1950 the Italian government showed more interested in the revision of some clause of the Italian peace treaty, especially the fate of the former African empire¹²; moreover Italy aimed at being recognised, though with scant results, an influential role in the early structures of the Atlantic Alliance, so Italy's general attitude seemed to confirm that its European choice was subject to more relevant goals, especially the recovery of a relevant international status, as well as a place in the new western system.

2. Alcide De Gasperi and the Climax of Italy's Commitment to a Federal Europe (1950-1954)

The real turning point in Italy's European choice was closely linked to the dramatic development in the European integration process which was the consequence of the emerging functionalist approach advocated by Jean Monnet, as well as of the launching of the Schuman Plan in May 1950. When the French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman, in his famous speech, announced the plan for the creation of a supranational community that would administer the French and West German coal and steel industries, he pointed out that this new body would be open to other European countries¹³. Almost immediately the Italian Government declared its willingness to join the Schuman Plan. Once again in an early stage the Italian authorities' first goal was a further official recognition of Italy's international status; moreover De Gasperi and his close advisers did not ignore that such a plan was welcomed in Washington, so strengthening Italy's image in the eyes of US decision-makers. The participation to the Schuman Plan, however, involved some important decision about the nation's economic future and in early stage private industrial milieu was sceptical, if not hostile to the plan¹⁴. Italian entrepreneurs, especially in the steel sector, had been accustomed to the protectionist policies pursued by both pre-Fascist liberal governments and the Fascist regime, and they feared the competition with stronger and more powerful industrial systems. In spite of that the influential state-owned steel industry under the control of the IRI had been aware of the dramatic changes which were taking place in the international economic system dominated by

¹¹ Merlone, Roberto: "Faire du Conseil de l'Europe l'Union Européenne": le projet de Carlo Sforza", in Bitsch, Marie-Thérèse (ed.) (1997): *Jalons pur une histoire du Conseil de l'Europe*, Bern, Peter Lang, pp. 79-82.

¹² For a general assessment see Rossi, Gianluigi (1980): *L'Africa italiana verso l'indipendenza (1942-1949)*, Milan, Giuffrè.

¹³ There is a wide scholarly production on the Schuman Plan and Monnet's role; nevertheless see Spierenburg, Dirk and Poidevin, Raymond (1993): *Histoire de l'Haute Autorité de la Communauté Européenne du Charbon et de l'Acier. Une histoire supranationale*, Brussels, Bruylant; Bossuat, Gérard and Wilkens, Andreas (eds) (1999): *Jean Monnet, l'Europe et les chemins de la paix*, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne.

¹⁴ On the Italian entrepreneurs' early attitude towards the European integration see Petrini, Francesco (2005): *Il liberismo a una dimensione. La Confindustria e l'integrazione europea 1947-1957*, Milan, Franco Angeli.



the US and they thought that a modernized Italian steel industry could favourably compete in a wider Western European market. The Marshall Plan ideals of an enlarged and integrated economic system had been welcomed by a tiny, although influential, group of politicians and state technocrats, who saw the Italian involvement in the Schuman Plan as a fundamental instrument in order to modernize the nation's economic system¹⁵. Moreover in the immediate post-war period the Italian political leadership had been confronted with a traditional social problem that had represented a stumbling block to Italy's economic progress: the presence of a large surplus of manpower, mainly composed by unskilled unemployed labour force from Southern Italy. Emigration had always been the easiest solution to such a traditional problem. In the immediate post-war years the Italian authorities had tried to work bilateral agreements with some European nation in order to open foreign labour markets to Italian immigrants, but with scant results; then they had hoped that the Marshall Plan could favour Italy's claims, but most western European countries had been hostile to the opening of their labour markets¹⁶. Now the Italian Government hoped that in the context of a wider and more ambitious project of a supranational character, such as the Schuman Plan, Italy could raise once again in a more effective way the thorny issue of Italy's unemployment.

The Italian delegation which took part to the Schuman Plan negotiations was effectively led by an influential Christian Democrat politician, Paolo Emilio Taviani and Italy's position was largely and positively influenced by the position of the tiny élite of politicians, diplomats and state technocrats who began to regard the country's adhesion to the integration process, not only as a way to strengthen Italy's international status, but also as an instrument to modernize the Italian economic system, a contribution to the solution of some long-term economic and social problem and a boost to Italy's economic and social progress¹⁷. Actually in that same period the Minister for Foreign Trade, the Republican Ugo La Malfa, enacted a series of liberalisation measures and an Italian economic expert¹⁸, Guido Carli, became the first president of the European Payment Union (EPU)¹⁹. Also private entrepreneurs began to be less sceptical towards the European integration as they realised that the governmental authorities would take into consideration their concerns. So the Italian delegation to the Schuman Plan negotiations was able to defend successfully the nation's interests: Italy's would accede to French iron material from Northern Africa, the principle of manpower mobility was recognised in the treaty and the Italian steel industry would enjoy a period of respite before being fully involved in the new integrated market. Especially the last provision offered the Italian authorities the opportunity for further modernising the state-owned steel industry, so the Italian steel plants would be able to compete successfully with their foreign competitors. In 1951 the Paris Treaty was signed and in 1952 the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was implemented. The economic factor became an important, almost vital, aspect of Italy's European choice.

The outbreak of the Korean War and the worsening contrast between the Western world and the Soviet bloc led to US and British pressures in order to rearm West Germany.

¹⁵ Ranieri, Ruggero and Tosi, Luciano (eds) (2004): *La Comunità Europea del Carbone e dell'Acciaio (1952-2002). Gli esiti del trattato in Europa e in Italia*, Padua, CEDAM.

¹⁶ On the emigration issue see Romero, Federico (1991): *Emigrazione e integrazione europea 1945-1973*, Rome, Edizioni Lavoro.

¹⁷ See the thoughtful analysis by Ranieri Ruggero, "L'Italia e i negoziati sul Piano Schuman", in Di Nolfo Ennio; Rainero, Romain; Vigezzi, Brunello (eds) (1986): *L'Italia e la politica di potenza in Europa (1945-1950)*, Milan, Marzorati, pp. 547-573.

¹⁸ On La Malfa see in general Mechi, Lorenzo (2003): *L'Europa di Ugo La Malfa. La via italiana alla modernizzazione (1942-1979)*, Milano, Franco Angeli.

¹⁹ On Guido Carli see Carli, Guido (1993): *Cinquant'anni di vita italiana*, Roma-Bari, Laterza.



France rejected the Anglo-American plans for creation of independent West German armed forces and in October 1950 the French Government, led by René Pleven, launched the plan for the creation of an integrated European army. Such a project, which was largely influenced by Jean Monnet and his advisers, would quickly develop into the scheme for the setting up of a European Defence Community (EDC) of a supranational character along the model of the ECSC. Although in an early stage both the US and France's Western European partners were sceptical of the French project, in February 1951 a conference was opened in Paris, which involved the six nations, which were already negotiating the Schuman Plan²⁰. So Italy joined the Paris talks, although the Italian authorities were convinced that such a scheme was doomed to failure and that the creation of a Western German army, integrated in the Atlantic Alliance machinery, would be the most obvious and feasible solution. But in summer 1951 the Paris conference was able to draft an important memorandum which appeared as a viable point of reference for the implementation of the Pleven plan. In the meantime the US administration had reassessed their policy towards the EDC and they became the staunchest advocates of a European Defence Community, which, in their opinion, could become the cornerstone of a federal anti-communist Europe. The Italian authorities, however, were sceptical of the EDC as the new Community was perceived as a threat to Italy's national interests from the political, military and economic viewpoints²¹. Nevertheless Italy could not contradict its Europeanist commitment, so in summer 1951 Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi, who was now also Foreign Minister, decided that Italy would launch an ambitious scheme based on the creation of a European Political Community (EPC). There have been different interpretations about De Gasperi's initiative. Some authors have interpreted De Gasperi's move as an instrument in order to safeguard the country's vital interests, as the political integration would conceal Italy's economic and military weakness. Other scholars claimed that the EPC scheme was the climax in the Italian growing commitment to the federalist ideal and De Gasperi's main goal would be the creation of a federal Europe. Perhaps there is some truth in both interpretations: De Gasperi thought that it would be possible to reconcile a strong federalist approach and the safeguard of the nation's most relevant interests. Moreover in De Gasperi's opinion there was no contradiction between Italy's commitment to the European integration and the country's faithfulness to the Atlantic alliance, without forgetting the defence of Italy's national interests²². This period can be regarded as the climax in both De Gasperi's and Italy's federalist choice. In May 1952 the EDC treaty was signed and article 38 foresaw the creation of a European Political Community, although such a scheme would be dealt with only after the implementation of the EDC. In the autumn of that same year, however, De Gasperi convinced his European partners, especially Schuman and Adenauer, that it would be possible to start immediate talks about the EPC: an "ad hoc" assembly was set up and in 1953 this body worked out the project of a European Political Community which, if implemented, would be a fundamental step towards the creation of a federal Europe²³.

²⁰ On the Pleven Plan see in general Ballini, Pier Luigi (ed.) (2009): *La Comunità Europea di Difesa (CED)*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino and Dumoulin, Michel (ed.) (2000), *La Communauté Européenne de Défense, lécons pour demain ?*, Bern, Peter Lang.

²¹ Varsori Antonio, "L'Italia fra alleanza atlantica e CED (1949-1954)", in *Storia delle relazioni internazionali*, vol. 3, no. 1(1988).

²² For a "traditional" interpretation of De Gasperi's European choice see Pastorelli, Pietro (1987): *La politica estera italiana del dopoguerra*, Bologna, il Mulino; for a "federalist" interpretation see Preda, Daniela (2004): *Alcide De Gasperi federalista europeo*, Bologna, il Mulino. For a nuanced and balance view see Craveri, Piero (2006): *De Gasperi*, Bologna, il Mulino.

²³ Preda Daniela (1994); *Sulla soglia dell'unione. La vicenda della Comunità Politica Europea*, Milano, Jaca Book.



Nevertheless in a short while De Gasperi's hopes were frustrated: the development in the international situation, especially the growing opposition to the EDC in France and the change in the Soviet leadership after Stalin's death, would cause serious obstacles to the ratification of the Paris treaty. Moreover De Gasperi had to face a difficult domestic situation: both the right and the left criticised the Prime Minister for the still unsettled Trieste question and both the Communists and the Socialists had launched an effective propaganda campaign against the ratification of the EDC. De Gasperi tried to strengthen his political position through the implementation of a new electoral law, but the general elections held in June 1953 sealed the defeat of De Gasperi's electoral reform and in summer 1953 the Christian Democrat leader was compelled to resign from office. The new Italian government led by the Christian Democrat Giuseppe Pella, was strongly influenced by nationalist bias and Pella almost tried to "blackmail" Italy's western partners: Italy would ratify the EDC treaty if the US and Britain would comply with Italy's claims on the Trieste issue. In fact it was less and less likely that the French National Assembly would ratify the EDC treaty²⁴.

Although Pella's nationalist ambitions were largely frustrated and he was compelled to resign, the new government, formed by the Christian Democrat Mario Scelba in early 1954, was very cautious about the EDC issue and while the Italian cabinet confirmed its commitment to the European choice and the EDC, it would choose a "low profile" attitude and would wait for a clarification of France's position. In August 1954 the French National Assembly rejected the EDC treaty. Such an event was perceived in Western Europe as the failure of the functionalist approach advocated by Europe's "founding fathers". Actually the Italian authorities were mainly worried about the US reaction and by the American threats to come back to a sort of "neo-isolationist" policy. For the Italian moderate politicians the bond between Europe and the US, that mainly meant the Atlantic alliance, was a vital goal, as it was not only the symbol of the US commitment to western Europe's security, but was also the symbol of Italy's domestic balance, which would mean the main obstacle to the coming to power of the Italian Communist Party²⁵.

During the second half of 1954 Italy's main concern was the preservation of the unity of the West and of the Atlantic alliance. So the Italian authorities complied with the Eden plan, which in October 1954 led to the Paris agreements. Such treaties marked the full sovereignty of the German Federal Republic, as well as its involvement in NATO and in the new Western European Union (WEU), which was joined also by Italy. Although the Atlantic Pact had been saved and Italy could claim to be a partner also in the Western body that had been the outcome of the Brussels Pact's transformation, Italian political and diplomatic milieu were not too happy of the new western European balance, which appeared to be shaped by some special relationships: the Anglo-American bond, a renewed British-French "entente", a strengthened relationship between Bonn and Washington. In such a context, characterised by traditional military and political alliances, Italy seemed to be a minor partner²⁶. The threat of marginalisation would favour Italy's renewed commitment to the functionalist approach to the European construction.

²⁴ De Leonardis, Massimo (1992): *La "diplomazia atlantica" e la soluzione del problema di Trieste (1952-1954)*, Naples, ESI.

²⁵ Canavero Alfredo: "La politica estera di un ministro degli Interni. Scelba, Piccioni, Martino e la politica estera italiana", in *Storia delle relazioni internazionali*, vol. 6, no. 1 (1990), pp. 63-97.

²⁶ See the revealing evaluations in "memorandum by L. Benvenuti" (13 July 1954), *Archivio Storico del Ministero Affari Esteri* (ASMAE), "Direzione Generale degli Affari Politici" (DGAP), box No. 331. L. Benvenuti was a Christian Democrat and in that period he was the under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs. A disciple of De Gasperi, he was a convinced federalist.



3. Italy and the re-Launching of Europe: a more Pragmatic Approach to the European integration (1955-1957)

During the mid-1950's, also owing to the developments in the domestic political situation, especially the crisis of the centre coalition governments, Italy's foreign policy experienced some relevant change. A new generation of Christian Democrat politicians, such as Giovanni Gronchi and Amintore Fanfani, advocated the launching of bold initiatives in the international context, which had to point out Italy's influential role in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Such a new tendency was labelled "neo-Atlanticism", a definition which implied a different interpretation of the Atlantic alliance and Italy's ambition, through a closer partnership with the US, to profit from the crisis of Britain's and France's imperial role²⁷. In spite of those ambitious goals, most Italian foreign policy makers did not forget the nation's Europeanist tradition and Italy joined the so-called "re-launching of Europe" from the Messina conference to the signature of the Rome Treaties. Although most scholarly contributions have played down Rome's role in the negotiations which led to the setting up of both the EEC and EURATOM, Italy's policy on those issues was an effective and coherent one. If West Germany and France were obviously the major players in the diplomatic game which characterised the "re-launching of Europe", from the beginning the Italian authorities singled out relevant practical goals, which were coherent with Rome's major national interests²⁸. As far as the project for a nuclear energy community, the Italian government was obviously interested in the creation of EURATOM as any development in this field would favour a country which had scant, if any, autonomous energy resources; moreover the Italian authorities had already showed their interest in developing a nuclear industry and Italy could enjoy an influential scientific tradition based on the studies developed in the 1930s by Enrico Fermi and other scientists²⁹. So the access to cheap energy sources would be an almost obvious boost to the country's economic development. The creation of a common market could pose some difficulties to the weak Italian industrial system, but Italy was ready to accept the challenge of competition with more powerful industrial partners if the Italian government could achieve some concession from the partner countries involved in the negotiations. In the opinion of some politicians, diplomats, industrialists and technocrats the participation to the European Economic Community could be a precious opportunity for the take-off of the Italian economy and for the economic and social modernization of the peninsula; last but not least, it could concur to the solution of the Mezzogiorno problem³⁰.

In this context the Italian delegation in the Spaak committee and later on in the inter-governmental conference aimed at achieving the following aims: a) the setting up of a European social policy that could solve the problems caused by the creation of a unified market, b) the recognition of the principle of manpower mobility, which could open the labour markets of the Community to Italian immigrants, c) the principle of a regional European policy which would concur to the solution of the *Mezzogiorno* [i. e. Southern Italy] problem, d) a policy of European investments that would boost the development of the Italian economic system, e) some reference to supranational political goals which would favour

²⁷ On this aspect of Italy's foreign policy see Brogi, Alessandro (1996): *L'Italia e l'egemonia Americana nel Mediterraneo*, Florence, La Nuova Italia and Id. (2002): *A Question of self-esteem. The United States and the Cold War Choices in France and in Italy, 1944-1958*, Westport/London, Praeger.

²⁸ See in general Serra, Enrico (ed.) (1989): *Il rilancio dell'Europa e i trattati di Roma*, Brussels-Milan-Paris-Baden Baden, Bruylant-Giuffrè-LGDJ-Nomos.

²⁹ Curli, Barbara (2000): *Il progetto nucleare italiano (1952-1964). Conversazioni con Felice Ippolito*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino.

³⁰ See the important memorandum on a meeting held in Rome on the eve of the Messina conference: "Note for the Minister" (26 May 1955), *Historical Archives of the European Union (HAEU), R. Ducci Records*.



Italy's position vis-à-vis its major European partners. Although the signature of the Rome treaties was mainly the outcome of a series of compromises between West Germany and France, Italy was able to achieve most of the goals the Rome authorities had been singled out in May 1955 on the eve of the Messina conference: manpower mobility was accepted by Italy's partners, the EEC treaty foresaw the creation of a European Social Fund (ESF) and of a European Investments Bank (EIB), the need to develop a regional policy was officially recognised and in the treaties there was some reference to the supranational political integration³¹. So Italy's policy was at the origins of the European social policy and the regional policy; from the late 1950s Italian immigrants could reach the new promising West German labour market and Italy's economic miracle was also the outcome of the setting up of a wider European market where the Italian booming industry would find an outlet for its manufactured products. Italy's confirmation of the European choice was perhaps less appealing and idealistic than the one advocated by De Gasperi, but it was a practical and rewarding one, as it became an important, almost a vital, stimulus to the country's rapid economic growth and to its social transformation and modernization³². Such factors would not be forgotten by Italian decision-makers in the following decades and they were perhaps the most important pillars of Italy's long-term steady commitment to the integration process.

4. Italy and the European Choice during the Centre-Left Era: Ambitions and Disappointments (1958-1968)

Between the late 1950s and the early 1960s Italy experienced the most dramatic transformation in its history: owing to a tumultuous economic boom the nation passed from a mainly backward society to a modern industrial one, although serious contradictions still characterised the Italian scene. Moreover a new political formula was worked out and in 1963 the first centre-left government was created, owing to the dialogue between the Christian Democrats and the Socialists which had started some years earlier³³. That was a period of great hopes and an optimistic mood shaped the attitude of the centre-left politicians, who thought that Italy had recovered the full role of a middle rank power, whose status was similar to the one enjoyed by the major western European nations: France, West Germany and Britain. The European construction was one of the contexts, with the Mediterranean, the Middle East and the East-West dialogue, in which the Italian Governments aimed at developing a more determined and ambitious foreign policy. In that same period, however, the European scene was strongly influenced by the coming back to power in France by General de Gaulle and by his foreign policy, so Italy was often confronted with de Gaulle's policy and goals³⁴.

In an early stage General de Gaulle was compelled to focus his attention and energies on the solution of the Algerian crisis, while, as far as France's international status was concerned, the French President hoped that NATO could be transformed through the creation of a "directorship" composed by the US, the United Kingdom and –obviously –

³¹ The position of the Italian delegation during the negotiations which led to the Rome treaties can be analysed through the records kept at the HAEU, CM 3/NEGO.

³² Ranieri, Ruggero: "L'Italia e l'integrazione economica europea negli anni Cinquanta", in *Storia delle relazioni internazionali*, vol. 13-14, no. 1-2 (1998-1999), pp. 361-376.

³³ On Italy during the centre-left see Craveri, Piero (1996): *La Repubblica dal 1958 al 1992*, Milan, TEA. See also Castronovo, Valerio (2010): *L'Italia del miracolo economico*, Roma-Bari, Laterza.

³⁴ On de Gaulle's foreign policy see Vaisse, Maurice (1998): *La Grandeur. Politique étrangère du Général de Gaulle 1958-1969*, Paris, Fayard.



France. But neither Washington nor London could accept de Gaulle's project, while France's European partners, especially West Germany and Italy, were obviously suspicious of France's motives and goals. In 1960, however, de Gaulle realised that his project for a reform of the NATO structures had failed and he switched his attention to the European Community. In this context de Gaulle launched the project for a European union, the so-called Fouchet Plan, which would favour close forms of intergovernmental cooperation in the political, cultural and military fields³⁵. Italy's reaction was a cautious one, but the Italian authorities favoured the starting of negotiations and they took an active part in the talks on the Fouchet Plan. In this context a leading role was played by Amintore Fanfani, who in this period was perhaps the most influential member of the Christian Democracy and Italy's Prime Minister³⁶. Both Fanfani and the Italian Foreign Ministry, which had changed its seat to the Farnesina building, were suspicious of de Gaulle's hegemonic goals, but they were convinced that France was a vital factor in the European construction. Moreover there were some positive elements in the French project as it would strengthen the position enjoyed by the "Six" in a rapidly changing international system and it was hoped that Italy could profit from such a development. So between 1960 and 1962 the Italian delegation tried to favour a compromise solution which would reconcile the French position with the one advocated by the Benelux countries, especially the Netherlands which were hostile to de Gaulle's schemes. The Italian authorities did not forget the need to maintain a close bond between the Fouchet Plan and both the EEC and the Atlantic alliance. In late 1961 Rome's efforts for a compromise appeared to be successful, but the dramatic change in de Gaulle's position led to the failure of the whole project. Nevertheless it is not surprising that the Italian Government tried to avoid any decision which could lead to a crisis of the EEC as the Rome authorities were too conscious of the advantages the Italian economy was obtaining from the country's participation to the Common Market³⁷. The aspiration at playing the role of a mediator characterised Rome's European policy also on the issue of the first attempt at an enlargement of the European Community. In spite of their early hostility to the "re-launching of Europe" and of the creation of the European Free Trade Area (EFTA), in summer 1961 the British authorities put forward Britain's candidature to the EEC; a few months later an official negotiation started in Brussels³⁸.

The Italian government openly supported Britain's application. In Rome it was thought that Britain's involvement in the EEC would have a moderating influence on de Gaulle's hegemonic goals; moreover the Italian authorities were aware of Washington's support to London's candidature and Fanfani and his political allies hoped that Italy could please the US administration, whose recognition of the centre-left experiment was a major goal for the Italian politicians who favoured such an initiative³⁹. Last but not least members of the centre-left parties regarded Britain as a political and social model for the policy of bold

³⁵ Soutou, Georges-Henri: "Le Général de Gaulle et le Plan Fouchet d'union politique européenne: un projet stratégique", in Deighton, Anne and Milward, Alan (eds) (1999): *Widening, Deepening and Acceleration. The European Economic Community 1957-1963*, Baden-Baden, Nomos and Caviglia, Daniele (2000): *De Gaulle e il tentativo di spostare l'asse politico europeo: il Piano Fouchet*, Padua, CEDAM.

³⁶ Martelli, Evelina (2008): *L'altro atlantismo. Fanfani e la politica estera italiana 1958-1963*, Milan, Guerini; Giovagnoli, Agostino and Tosi, Luciano (eds) (2010): *Amintore Fanfani e la politica estera italiana*, Venice, Marsilio.

³⁷ On Italy's position see for example the documents: Documents no. 118 and no. 120, *Documents Diplomatiques Français*, 1962, Bern, Peter Lang.

³⁸ Kaiser, Wolfram (1996): *Using Europe Abusing the Europeans: Britain and European Integration*, London, Macmillan; Ludlow, Piers (1997): *Dealing with Britain: the Six and the First UK Application to the EEC*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

³⁹ Nuti, Leopoldo (1999): *Gli Stati Uniti e l'apertura a sinistra. Importanza e limiti della presenza americana in Italia*, Roma-Bari, Laterza.



reforms they were advocating in the domestic context. So the Italian authorities did their best in order to solve the numerous problems that were threatening the successful outcome of the Brussels negotiations. Although the British cabinet appreciated the Italian delegation's initiatives and they formed a positive opinion of Emilio Colombo, the head of the Italian delegation, the British government perceived Italy as a minor actor, unable to exert a vital influence on the political aspects of London's application to the Common Market. On its part, in late 1962 the Italian Foreign ministry realised that the French were stiffening their position and put pressure on London in order to do some concession in the economic field as a means to overcome the growing political difficulties; moreover the Italian authorities thought that British economic claims would never be fully accepted by the "Six", as they would threaten the main characters of the EEC, especially its being a regional economic area, as well as the attempts at creating a Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Italy's advice, however, was not taken into consideration in London, where Italy's influence was underrated⁴⁰. Some Italian politician, such as Ugo La Malfa, put forward the project for an Anglo-Italian cooperation treaty on the model of the French-German one that Adenauer and de Gaulle were negotiating, but in London such an initiative was regarded as a bizarre move, while Fanfani and the Italian Foreign Ministry disavowed La Malfa's initiative as it was too risky and they still hoped that some compromise solution could be achieved⁴¹. Actually in January 1963 General de Gaulle publicly announced his veto to Britain's admission to the EEC. The Italian authorities confirmed their support to London's candidature, but they were not ready to put much pressure on de Gaulle, as the preservation of the Common Market machinery and its economic advantages were the top priorities of the Rome Government⁴².

So, although most Italian politicians pointed out their commitment to the Europeanist ideals, the Italian government's attitude to the European Community was a pragmatic one. Such a position was confirmed on the occasion of the "empty chair" crisis which took place in 1965/1966. Italy played a leading role in unleashing the crisis, as, especially in an early stage, the contrast between the "five" and France was the outcome of the negative evaluation by both the Italian and the German authorities of the CAP early machinery. Especially in the Italian case the CAP was becoming a burden to the Italian budget and Italian peasants enjoyed very few advantages from this European policy⁴³. When the crisis broke out in summer 1965 the Italian Foreign Minister, Fanfani, had no intention to give up on the agricultural issue, while he appeared more ready to find out a compromise on the political aspects, that is the political role of the European Commission. But in the later phase of the crisis Fanfani, who was compelled to stay in New York as he had been appointed chairman of the UN Assembly, played a minor role. So it was to the Treasury Minister, Emilio Colombo, to represent the Italian position; Colombo favoured a compromise solution and in a meeting he had with the French Foreign Minister, Maurice Couve de Murville, he sketched out a formula that was similar to the so-called Luxembourg compromise. Once again the Italian authorities, in spite of the lip service paid to the competences and role of the European Commission and to the federalist ideals, were more interested in the economic advantages of the EEC and in

⁴⁰ Varsori, "La Cenerentola ...", *op. cit.*, pp. 175-187.

⁴¹ For the British Cabinet's reaction to La Malfa's initiative see the documents in *National Archives London (NAL)*, Foreign Office 371 (FO 371), CJ 1051/4 and CJ 1051/11 (163718).

⁴² On the Italian Foreign Ministry's evaluation of the whole episode see "memorandum by R. Ducci to A. Piccioni (04 February 1963), ASMAE, "Pansa Cedronio Files".

⁴³ See the important "letter by the Italian Prime Minister Aldo Moro to the President of the European Commission, W. Hallstein" (06 June 1964), *Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS)*, Presidenza Consiglio dei Ministri 1962-1964, box No. 667.



safeguarding the Common Market⁴⁴. Such a cautious and pragmatic attitude was confirmed on the occasion of the second British application to the European Community: the Italian authorities confirmed their support to London's candidature but they were sceptical about the possibility to have Britain as a full member of the EEC, at least until de Gaulle was in power⁴⁵. On the contrary the Italian authorities focused their attention on the possibility that some form of European construction could lead to scientific and technological cooperation, as in the late 1960s there was a growing awareness in Europe of the technological gap between the "old continent" and the US and such a gap would negatively influence the future perspectives of western Europe's economy and industrial system. However Italy's initiative in both the EEC and NATO was premature and the only result was a bi-lateral agreement with the US⁴⁶.

Although Italy's political initiatives during the de Gaulle era had scant results, the Italian economy profited in a substantial way from the nation's involvement in the integration process. Moreover, through the participation to the European Community, Italy experienced a process of economic and social modernization that contributed to the radical transformation of the country. The political, diplomatic and economic elites were fully aware of the important role the EEC played in such a process and, in spite of their concern about the lack of a political integration, they thought that the defence of the European Community, especially of its customs union, was a vital national interest⁴⁷. It is a commonplace that the Italian authorities paid scant attention to the role Italian officials and diplomats could play in the structures of the European Community. Actually, although during the late 1950s and the 1960s there were some inconsistencies in the policy pursued by Italian governments on this issues, from the mid-1960s onwards some Italian members of the European Commission had an important part in the Commission's activities; in this context it would be possible to remember the role played by Lionello Levi Sandri, who was also deputy-President of the Commission and his activities were at the origins of important decisions in the field of the Community's social policy, especially as far as the regulations related to manpower mobility were concerned. Another Italian Commissioner, Edoardo Martino, exerted some influence in the early decisions by the Commission dealing with the Community's external relations and, for example, he supported the freezing of the Association agreement with Greece as a consequence of the military coup of April 1967. So, if Italy's role during the first decade of the Community's life cannot be compared to the one played by France and West Germany, Italy was not a passive actor and both its initiatives and the ones by the Italian representatives in Brussels concurred in shaping some relevant character of the European Community⁴⁸.

⁴⁴ Varsori (2010): "La Cenerentola...", *op. cit.*, pp. 187-203. Several important records about Fanfani's role are available in the *Archivio Storico del Senato (ASS)*, *Amintore Fanfani Files*, box No. 35. In general about the "empty chair crisis" see Palayret, Jean-Marie; Wallane, Helen and Winand, Pascaline (eds) (2006): *Visions, Votes and Vetoes. The Empty Chair Crisis and the Luxembourg Compromise Forty Years On*, Brussels/Bern, PIE/Peter Lang.

⁴⁵ "Record of conversation Brown-Fanfani" (29 December 1967), *NAL*, *FCO 33/344*.

⁴⁶ On this Italian initiative see the records in *ASMAE*, *Bettini Files*.

⁴⁷ Ranieri, Ruggero: "L'industria italiana e l'integrazione comunitaria: una sfida riuscita", in Craveri, Piero and Varsori, Antonio (eds.) (2009), *op. cit.*, pp. 187-210.

⁴⁸ See in general Varsori, Antonio: "L'Italia a Bruxelles: i membri italiani della Commissione", in Craveri Piero, and Varsori, Antonio (eds) (2009), *op. cit.*, pp. 145-164. On Levi Sandri see Mechi, Lorenzo and Varsori, Antonio (eds.) (2008): *Lionello Levi Sandri e la politica sociale europea*, Milan, Franco Angeli.



5. Italy Confronts a New European Integration (1969-1973)

The Hague summit conference held in December 1969 marked a turning point in the European integration; the process that was initiated on this occasion led to a Community that had different characters and goals⁴⁹. From the late 1940s till the late 1960s the European construction had been characterised by definite patterns: a) the pivotal role played by the Europe of the “Six”, b) the implementation of very few European policies - mainly the customs union and the CAP, c) the leading influence exerted by moderate, usually Christian Democrat, parties, d) a strong pro-Atlanticist and pro-US position, in spite of de Gaulle’s attempt at pursuing a more independent policy. The late 1960s, however, meant a sort of “revolution” in the European social and political scenario, which, at least for a decade, saw a definite switch to the left; as far as the international context was concerned, the transatlantic relationship weakened and western Europe aimed at developing a more independent role from the US, the hope of a continuing economic growth was frustrated by the economic crisis of the early 1970s and the monetary turmoil which characterised the whole decade; some of the values on which the European integration had been built up, such as a moderate Catholic Europe, disappeared or weakened. So, although in the Community’s activities there were some relevant elements of continuity, especially as far as the institutions and the treaties were concerned, a new “spirit” in the European integration surfaced: the decisions taken at the Hague conference were the early evidence of such a change, which was confirmed by the declaration of the Paris summit of October 1972 on Europe’s social identity and of the Copenhagen summit of December 1973 on Europe’s political identity. The Community experienced its first enlargement and the “Six” were joined by Ireland, Denmark and the UK; new policies were launched or old policies were strengthened (social policy, regional policy, energy policy, environmental policy, monetary policy); a Community budget was set up, an embryo European foreign policy was created through the European Political Cooperation (EPC)⁵⁰.

Which was Italy’s reaction to such a dramatic change in the characters of the European integration? With the exception of the decision on the Community’s enlargement which had been a traditional goal of Italy’s foreign policy, the other goals approved at The Hague appeared to create concern rather than enthusiasm in Rome. The creation of a common budget was tied to the implementation in the member states of a fiscal reform, the implementation of the Value Added Tax (VAT), that would cause serious difficulties to both the Italian public administration and the country’s weakening economic system as the Italian economy was entering a long period of growing difficulties (inflation, high state deficit, etc.). The Community’s aspiration at launching a monetary policy was perceived in a negative way by Italian economic and political milieu and by the Bank of Italy, which had scant confidence in a system that aimed at becoming independent from the dollar. Last but not least the strengthening of the CAP was still interpreted as a novelty which would not give Italy relevant advantages⁵¹. In order to counterbalance such developments, the Italian authorities singled some goals whose achievement would be a positive factor for Italy’s national interests. In this context Italy advocated the reform of the Community’s social policy and the launching of a new and bold European regional policy; from the implementation of both

⁴⁹ On the Hague summit see Guasconi, Maria Eleonora (2004): *L’Europa tra cambiamento e continuità. Il vertice dell’Aja del 1969 e il rilancio della costruzione europea*, Florence, Polistampa.

⁵⁰ See Van der Harst (ed.) (2007): *Beyond the Customs Union: The European Community’s Quest for Deepening, Widening and Completion 1969-1975*, Brussels-Paris-Baden Baden, Bruylant-LGDJ-Nomos. For an analysis of the social and cultural transformations see Chassaigne, Philippe (2008) : *Les années 1970. Fin d’un monde et origine de notre modernité*, Paris, Colin.

⁵¹ For a general assessment see Varsori (2010): “La Cenerentola ...”, *op. cit.*, pp. 225-283.



policies Italy hoped to profit very much, as usual in order to face the *Mezzogiorno* problem. Actually, at least in theory, Italy's initiatives were partially successful as there was a reform of the ESF, in 1974 the first European Social Action Programme was launched, while in 1975 the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) was set up⁵². Moreover during the early 1970s Italy's role in Brussels appeared to be strengthened: in 1970 an Italian, the Christian Democrat Franco Maria Malfatti, was appointed President of the European Commission, and a well-known and active representative of the federalist movement, Altiero Spinelli became member of the Commission. Moreover during the 1970s Italy could rely on other influential Commissioners such as Carlo Scarascia Mugnozza and Lorenzo Natali⁵³. In spite of those achievements, in a few years, Italy's position in the integration process was severely hampered and by the mid-1970s Italy would be perceived as "Europe's Cinderella"⁵⁴. Such a negative evolution had some definite reasons: a) the worsening of Italy's domestic situation from the economic, social and political viewpoints; b) the lack of confidence in the European partners showed by relevant sectors of Italy's political world, c) the negative perception of the Italian internal situation offered by the international media, d) some decision taken by the Italian authorities such as the floating of the lira and its leaving the European monetary "snake" in 1973, as well as the decision to rely on the US financial support in order to face the financial and economic crisis⁵⁵.

Although in the aftermath of The Hague Summit conference, Italy tried to pursue a consistent European policy and the Italian authorities could claim some partial achievements, by 1973/1974 Italy was perceived by most member states more as a problem rather than an asset for the European Community

6. Italy and the European Community: Crisis and Recovery (1974-1979)

By the mid-1970s Italy was perceived by its western powers as one of the weakest links in the Western European system. The economic system appeared on the verge of a total collapse; the traditional moderate political class seemed to be unable to cope with the serious domestic problems that were shaking the nation's structures; social turmoil was widespread; terrorist attacks both from the extreme right and the extreme left were threatening the basis of the Italian democratic system; last but not least, the only solution to the country's plight appeared to be the involvement of the powerful Communist Party in governmental responsibilities, a perspective which was feared by Italy's Western allies. So in the European context some foreign opinion-makers opined the Italy could be left out of the Western European system. Italy's shaky position was not isolated, as in the mid-1970s most western decision-makers were concerned about the future of the whole southern European area: in April 1974 the "Carnation Revolution" in Portugal opened a period of social turmoil and political uncertainty and in Lisbon the extreme left seemed to be on the eve of coming to power; in July 1974 the

⁵² Mechi, Lorenzo and Varsori, Antonio: "At the Origins of the European Structural Policy: the Community's Social and Regional Policies from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s", in Van der Harst (ed.) (2007), *op. cit.*, pp. 223-250.

⁵³ Varsori Antonio: "L'Italia a Bruxelles ...", *op. cit.*, in Craveri Piero and Varsori Antonio (eds) (2009), *op. cit.*, pp. 145-164. Important primary sources about the role played by Malfatti, Spinelli, Scarascia Mugnozza and Natali are available in the HAEU.

⁵⁴ This definition was the title of an article written by the "Times" correspondent in Rome, Peter Nichols in 1973 (*Italy feeling itself the Cinderella of Europe*).

⁵⁵ On Italy's position see the interesting records available in *Luigi Sturzo Institute (AILS), Giulio Andreotti Archive, box No. 353*.



military regime in Greece fell and, although a moderate government, led by Konstantinos Karamanlis, took power, the new Prime Minister was almost compelled by a wave of strong anti-American feelings to announce Greece's decision to leave NATO; Greece's internal developments had been fuelled by the failed coup d'état in Cyprus and by the island's Turkish invasion; last but not least in 1975 Franco's illness was opening the path to a phase of political and social uncertainty about Spain's future. As nobody could foresee the positive developments that would characterise Southern Europe in the following decades Italy was not perceived as an exception in this gloomy scenario⁵⁶. Although during the second half of the 1970s the Italian governments were very weak and shaken by tragic episodes such as in spring 1978 the kidnapping and assassination of former Prime Minister Aldo Moro, most Italian leaders and diplomats were aware that the confirmation of Italy's loyalty to the European integration was a vital choice in order to defend Italy's being a full member of the western system. So, in spite of their weakness, the Italian governments strongly reaffirmed their commitment to the European construction and, for example, were strong advocates of the political integration and of a strengthened role for the European Parliament through the direct election of the members of the Strasbourg assembly.

In this context a major development was the radical change in the Italian Communists' attitude towards the integration process. From the late 1960s onward members of the Italian Communist Party had been admitted to the European Parliament; moreover the Communist leadership led by Enrico Berlinguer, although still critical of some aspects of the European integration, began to regard the integration process as an important positive phenomenon and during the 1970s they began to support a federalist approach. In 1976 the federalist leader and former European Commissioner, Altiero Spinelli, announced his candidature as an independent for the PCI to the Italian elections and in 1979 the Italian Communist Party supported his candidature to the first European elections. Actually the Communist Party's position about the European construction, as well as Berlinguer's acceptance of Italy's membership in NATO were characterised by some ambiguities; as far as the European choice was concerned, the Italian Communist leaders always referred to a federal Europe from the Atlantic Ocean to the Urals in an international context, where military alliances would be abolished⁵⁷. It was very difficult for Western leaders and diplomats to regard in an enthusiastic way such projects and they were still very sceptical about the Italian Communists' real conversion to both the western world and the European ideals. So, in spite of the Italian Communists' statements of their loyalty to the Europeanist ideals, Bonn, Paris and London, with the obvious support of Washington did every effort in order to avoid the Communist Party's direct involvement in governmental responsibilities.

Western fears reached their climax between 1975 and 1976, especially on the occasion of the Italian general elections which appeared destined to lead to the Communist Party's "overcoming" (*sorpasso*) the Christian Democracy. In spite of Christian Democrats' maintaining a leading position, the Communist scored about 34 % of the polls and the new Prime Minister, the Christian Democrat Giulio Andreotti, was compelled to form a government which had to rely on the benign attitude of the Communists in the Parliament. In this period Italy's economy was experiencing serious financial difficulties and the Rome authorities needed the support of their major Western European partners, as well as of the US

⁵⁶ For the western reaction to the crises in Southern Europe of the mid-1970's see the recent contribution De Piero, Mario; Gavin, Victor; Guirao, Fernando; Varsori, Antonio (2010): *Democrazie. La fine delle dittature nell'Europa meridionale*, Florence, Le Monnier.

⁵⁷ Varsori (2010): "La Cenerentola...", *op. cit.*, pp. 299-314. Relevant documents about the Italian Communists' attitude towards the European integration are available at the archives of the "Fondazione Istituto Gramsci" (Rome).



and the IMF. The major members of the European Community, with the support of the US administration, worked out a strategy which was based on the assumption that Italy would receive western financial aid subject to the condition that the Communists would not be directly involved in the future Italian cabinet. In the policy pursued by Bonn, Paris, London and Washington the European Community was a useful instrument in a western strategy whose main goal was Italy's political and economic stabilisation⁵⁸. On the other hand, in the opinion of Rome's moderate leaders and diplomats, Italy's European choice was an important way to maintain the peninsula's link with the western world, while the Italian Communists' European choice was not enough to convince Italy's major western allies of the Communist Party's conversion to the West and its fundamental ideals.

Between 1976 and 1978 the Italian political class, especially Prime Minister Andreotti, was able to achieve some respite from its Western partners and in spite of the fact that in 1978, due to the dramatic crisis provoked by the kidnapping of Aldo Moro, Andreotti formed a government of "national unity", indirectly supported by the Communists, there was no open negative reaction on the part of both the major western partners and the European Community. But during the second half of 1978 the European choice would lead to a further dramatic change in Italy's domestic situation. Between late 1977 and early 1978 West Germany and France began to work out a plan which aimed at the creation of a more effective European monetary system⁵⁹. Italy joined the negotiations and hoped to achieve relevant concessions about the rate of exchange, the funding the regional policy and the CAP; in such a context the Italian diplomacy thought that the Italian government could create a common front with Britain. Although in an early stage Italian political milieu and public opinion did not pay much attention to this issue, during the second half of 1978 numerous influential milieu showed a sceptical attitude towards the project for a European Monetary System: the Governor of the Bank of Italy, Paolo Baffi, was doubtful about its effectiveness, the Italian industrialists preferred the short-term advantages of a weak lira, the parties of the Left, especially the Communists, feared that the lira's involvement in the future EMS would involve deflationary policies that would hit the working class⁶⁰. In late November, on the eve of the final European summit due to be held in Brussels, the British Cabinet informed the Italian authorities that London would not join the European project, so leaving the Italians to face alone the other European partners⁶¹; moreover the Italian Communists openly stated their objections to the lira's immediate participation to the EMS; the Communist Party's opposition to the EMS very likely would involve a governmental crisis a few months after Moro's assassination and in a troubled political atmosphere⁶². In spite of all that, Andreotti and the Christian Democracy, supported by the small moderate parties, decided that Italy would immediately join the European Monetary System. Such a decision, which was coherent with Italy's traditional European commitment, would cause the end of the "national unity" government and in a few months the Communists came back to the opposition⁶³. Moreover in 1979 the Italian Government would comply with the NATO's decisions about the euro-missiles. In a few months Italy had confirmed both its loyalty to the Atlantic alliance and to

⁵⁸ Varsori, Antonio: "le potenze occidentali e il problema comunista in Italia", *Ventesimo Secolo*, no. 16 (2008).

⁵⁹ On the creation of the EMS see Ludlow, Peter (1982): *The Making of the European Monetary System. A Case Study of the Politics of the European Community*, London, Butterworth.

⁶⁰ On Italy's adhesion to the EMS see the important records available at AILS, *Giulio Andreotti Archive*, box No. 399 and box No. 400. See for example box No. 400, "letter P. Baffi to G. Andreotti" (09 November 1978).

⁶¹ "Letter. J. Callaghan to G. Andreotti" (29 November 1978), AILS, *Giulio Andreotti Archive*, Box No. 400.

⁶² On the Italian Communists' position see Barca, Luciano (2005): *Cronache dall'interno del PCI*, 3 vols, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, pp. 474-763.

⁶³ "memorandum" (09 December 1978), AILS, *Giulio Andreotti Archive*, box No. 399.



the European Community, so joining the western bloc in the emerging second cold war. Italy's participation to the EMS was not only a confirmation of the nation's steady alignment to the West and the end of the uncertainties of the 1970s, but it also represented an early test of what would be labelled as Italy's European "external bond". Through the involvement in the EMS Italian decision-makers could impose to the Italian public opinion unpopular economic policies, which they would be unable to pursue without the international constraints decided in Brussels. So the European choice would become an almost vital element of internal economic policy, to which the Rome authorities would resort on further occasions in the future⁶⁴.

7. Italy and the European Integration in the 1980s: the Ambitions of the Craxi Era (1980-1992)

During the 1980s Italy experienced a period of apparent economic recovery, political stability and social modernization. The Italian Governments, characterised by politicians such as Craxi, Andreotti, De Michelis, etc. were able to overcome the difficulties and problems of the 1970s and Italy recovered a positive international image⁶⁵. As an almost obvious consequence Italian decision-makers came back to an ambitious foreign policy; actually Italy appeared to play a relevant role in the Atlantic Alliance and profited from a renewed strong bond with the US, especially owing to its firm commitment to the instalment of the euro-missiles; in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, the Italian authorities launched a series of initiatives that marked Rome's independent and influential role. As far as the European integration, in an early stage Italy's position was negatively influenced by the general stalemate which characterised the European Community during the early 1980s, although the Rome government strongly advocated the reinforcement of the political integration –Italy's usual long-term European goal – and tried to launch some joint German-Italian initiative, such as in the case of the Colombo-Genscher declaration⁶⁶. Actually a new "re-launching of Europe" took place between 1983 and 1984 as a consequence of a new French-German rapprochement, which was sealed in 1985 with the appointment of Jacques Delors as President of the European Commission. Both President François Mitterrand and Chancellor Helmut Kohl had realised that only through a renewed European commitment the "old continent" could face the challenges posed by a rapidly changing international context and by the early symptoms of a globalised economy⁶⁷.

Especially during the first half of 1985 Italy played a relevant and autonomous role in supporting this new French-German strategy. In January 1985 the Italian Government, led by Bettino Craxi, took the presidency of the European Community and the Rome authorities aimed at marking this period through some relevant achievements. First of all, also owing to

⁶⁴ On the "external bond" see Gualtieri, Roberto: "L'Europa come vincolo esterno", in Craveri and Varsori (eds) (2009), *op. cit.*, pp. 313-331.

⁶⁵ On Italy in the 1980s see Di Nolfo, Ennio (ed.) (2003): *La politica estera italiana negli anni Ottanta*, Manduria, Lacaita; Colarizi, Simona; Craveri, Piero; Pons, Silvio and Quagliariello, Gaetano (eds.) (2004): *Gli anni Ottanta come storia*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino and the recent Gervasoni, Marco (2010): *Storia dell'Italia negli anni Ottanta. Quando eravamo moderni*, Venice, Marsilio.

⁶⁶ See Stark, Hans (2004): *Kohl, l'Allemagne et l'Europe. La politique d'intégration européenne de la république Fédérale 1982-1988*, Paris, l'Harmattan, pp. 32-42.

⁶⁷ On the French-German relationship see in general Soutou, Georges-Henri (1996): *L'alliance incertaine. Le rapports politico.stratégiques franco-allemands 1954-1996*, Paris, Fayard. On the French-German initiatives see also Delors, Jacques (2003): *Mémoires*, Paris, Plon.



the initiatives of the Italian Foreign Minister, Giulio Andreotti, Italy favoured the quick conclusions of the negotiations which led to the adhesion of both Spain and Portugal to the EC. In the opinion of the Italian authorities such a development would favour a new balance in the Community, so if the Italian agriculture would have to face the competition of the Mediterranean products from the Iberian peninsula, southern European interests would have a major influence in Brussels and in the long run the Italian agriculture and the regions of the “Mezzogiorno” would profit from such a new balance. However Italy’s attention focused on the plans for a reinforcement of the political integration and for a reform of the Rome treaties⁶⁸. As in the past the Italian authorities, whose position was strengthened by the initiatives pursued during the early 1980s by Altiero Spinelli and by the European Parliament, hoped that a supra-national approach would be also a boost to Italy’s national interests⁶⁹. In this context on the occasion of the Milan European Council the Italian delegation, led by Craxi and Andreotti, played a significant role, as the two Italian leaders were able to impose a majority vote on the issue of the convening of an intergovernmental conference which would deal with the reform of the Rome Treaties. The Italian delegation’s initiative led to the Luxembourg conference and to the signature of the Single European Act, the first significant change in the Rome Treaties. In spite of this relevant diplomatic achievement, the Italian government appeared unable to rip the fruits of this success as during the Luxembourg negotiations the Rome authorities decided to stick to a strict federalist approach, which was not shared by Italy’s European partners. So it is not surprising that while some Italian scholars still regard the Milan council as a cornerstone in Italy’s European policy, several foreign historians and witnesses have played down the importance of such a Council, as well as Italy’s role⁷⁰.

That was not, however, the only contradiction of Italy’s European policy. Most Italian decision-makers still regarded the country’s European choice mainly as a matter of high politics and usually in such a context the Italian position was an effective one. Few Italian politicians on the contrary understood that, also owing to the Single European Act, the European integration had experienced some relevant developments, especially the implementation of a new budget and of new European policies. But such a radical change involved new responsibilities and duties for the member-states at every level, from the parliament to the national bureaucracy, to the local authorities, especially the regions. Such an attitude often prevented Italy from exploiting the opportunities offered by the European Community in various fields: the CAP, the regional policy and from the late 1980s in general the launching of the structural funds. On the contrary on several occasions, also as a consequence of the Italian civil service’s ineffectiveness, the Italian Government was compelled to face onerous fines for lack of compliance with Brussels’ regulations⁷¹. So during the second half of the 1980s there was a steady decline of Italy’s role and image in the

⁶⁸ On Italy’s role on the occasion of the Milan European Council see the documents in *AILS, Giulio Andreotti Archive, box No. 377*.

⁶⁹ On Spinelli’s initiatives see Spinelli, Altiero (1992): *Diario europeo, 1976-1986*, vol. 3, Bologna, il Mulino. In general on Spinelli see Graglia, Piero (2008): *Altiero Spinelli*, Bologna, il Mulino.

⁷⁰ For a contrast of views see Mammarella, Giuseppe: “Il Consiglio Europeo di Milano del giugno 1985”, in Di Nolfo (ed.) (2003), *op. cit.*, pp. 299-300 ; Védrine, Hubert (1996), *Les mondes de François Mitterrand. A l’Elysée 1981-1995*, Paris, Fayard; Dumas, Roland (2007) : *Affaires Etrangères, 1981-1988*, vol. 1, Paris, Fayard.

⁷¹ Mechi, Lorenzo, “Abilità diplomatica, insuccessi economici, progressi amministrativi. Appunti per una storia dell’Italia e i fondi strutturali”, in Craveri, Varsori (eds.) (2009), *op. cit.*, pp. 187-210.



integration process, although the Italian decision-makers appeared to be only partially aware of such a development⁷².

The fall of the Berlin wall and the process of German reunification led to an acceleration of the integration process. Italy favoured both the intergovernmental conference on the EMU and the one on the political integration, moreover some Italian politicians and diplomats hoped that Italy could play a relevant role in the quick change of the European scenario caused by the end of the cold war⁷³. As far as the European Monetary Union was concerned, Italy's position was mainly shaped by the Treasury Minister, Carli, and the Governor of the Bank of Italy, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi. Especially the latter was a staunch Europeanist and during the 1980s under his leadership the Italian central bank had become the point of reference of a small group of technocrats, who were convinced that Italy's economic future was closely tied to the progress of the political and economic integration as only through such a determined choice Italy could overcome its structural economic and financial problems, as well as the weakness of its political class. So the Italian delegation strongly supported the project for the completion of the EMU, especially the creation of a European common currency. Moreover they were in favour of the so-called "Maastricht parameters": they were aware that such clauses would impose a dramatic change in Italy's economic policy, especially as far as the tendency to a growing state deficit, but they had confidence in the validity of the "external bond", which in their opinion had already demonstrated its vital role in the late 1970s owing to the participation of the lira in the EMS⁷⁴.

As far as the political integration was concerned, such a development was the almost obvious consequence of both the fall of the Berlin wall and the perspective of a rapid German reunification. In an early stage Italian foreign policy makers, like other western European leaders, nurtured some suspicion about the creation of a reunified Germany. But in a few weeks both Andreotti, now Prime Minister, and the Foreign Minister Gianni De Michelis realized that the German reunification would be an unavoidable development and they openly stated Italy's support to Kohl's foreign policy. Nevertheless they thought that such a radical change in the European continent and the emergence of a powerful German state could be counterbalanced by a strengthening of the European political integration and the maintenance of the Atlantic alliance. The European Union and a closer link with the US would be the safeguard against any German "sonderweg". In this connection the Italian authorities were very active and they tried, especially in 1990 when Italy had the presidency of the European Community to play a leading role in the intergovernmental conference that would lead to the Maastricht Treaty. Moreover, it is not surprising that, as far as the issue of European defence was concerned, the Rome government was suspicious of a too strong European defence system, which would be based on a French-German "directorate" and in 1991 Rome and London, through a joint declaration, stated their interest in the link between the future EU and NATO. When the Maastricht treaty was signed it seemed that Italy's goals had been partially achieved and, although Germany and France had played a major role in the negotiations, the

⁷² See the interpretations offered in Soutou, Georges-Henri, "L'Italie et le 'couple' franco-allemand", Ludlow, Piers: "In Search of a Balance: Italy, Britain and the Dream of another European Axis", Neri Gualdesi, Marinella: "L'Italia e l'Europa negli anni Ottanta: tra ambizioni e marginalità", in Craveri and Varsori (eds.) (2009), *op. cit.*, pp. 43-108.

⁷³ See Varsori Antonio: "Italy and the German reunification", paper presented at a conference on *Europe and 1989* held in Geneva in October 2010.

⁷⁴ Dyson, Kevin and Featherstone, Kevin (1999): *The Road to Maastricht. Negotiating Economic and Monetary Union*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 508-533. See also Craveri, Piero (ed.) (2009): *Guido Carli senatore e ministro del Tesoro 1983-1992*, Milan, Bollati Boringhieri.



Italian government had contributed to the successful outcome of a complex set of negotiations⁷⁵.

Although some Italian statesmen, especially Prime Minister Andreotti, and the Bank of Italy were aware of the demanding implications of the economic clauses of the Maastricht treaty, it is very likely that the majority of the Italian political class thought that Italy could successfully face the challenge posed by the treaty on the European Union. On the contrary the perspective of the radical changes foreseen in the Maastricht agreement negatively influenced the Italian economic and financial system, which was perceived by most international economic actors as very weak. Such an attitude indirectly concurred to the sudden outbreak of the collapse of the country's political system and to a dangerous crisis of Italy's role in the emerging European Union. In 1992 the "clean hands" scandal led to the tragic end of the Italian party system which had dominated the country from the late 1940s onwards. Such a change was also the consequence of the end of the cold war and of the political allegiances which had shaped the attitude of the Italian voters owing to the hopes and fears created by the world confrontation between East and West. But such a dramatic development took place on the morrow of the Maastricht Treaty signature; so Italy's political turmoil almost obviously led to a serious financial crisis, whose outcome was the ousting of the lira from the EMS and to the perception by its European partners of Italy as the "sick man" of Europe and as an unfeasible candidate to the final step in the EMU process⁷⁶.

8. Italy and the European Union in the Prodi and Berlusconi Years: Success and Crisis (1993-2010)

The collapse of the Italian party system, worsened by the uncertainties and doubts about Italy's role in the new European system created by the Maastricht Treaty favoured the emergence of new political actors and of a new balance in the country. The period between 1992 and 1996 was characterised by a series of weak governments and it is not surprising that the main goal of the Amato, Ciampi and Dini cabinets was the recovery of the Italian economic and financial system, which had been severely shaken by both the 1992 monetary crisis and the political uncertainty about the country's political system. In this connection Italy's faithfulness to the European integration was a vital factor as the country's future was closely tied to the EU and its developments. So it is not surprising that both Ciampi and Dini were perceived in Brussels as two technocrats with strong European credentials and especially the former was a well-known Europeanist⁷⁷. As far as the domestic balance was concerned, the most striking novelty was the appearance of a new political force "Forza Italia" and by its leader, the media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi. In 1994 "Forza Italia", which led a centre-right coalition formed by the Northern League and Gianfranco Fini's "National Alliance" won the elections. The creation of the first Berlusconi government was viewed with some concern in Brussels and in several European capitals, not only for the characters and goals of the coalition members, but also as it appeared to show a very weak commitment to the Europeanist ideals. It is of some relevance to notice that Berlusconi appointed Foreign Minister Antonio Martino, an economist and son of Gaetano Martino, who however was an

⁷⁵ On Italy's position see the documents in *AILS, Giulio Andreotti Archive, box No. 382, box No. 411, box No. 458*.

⁷⁶ On this economic crisis see Rossi, Salvatore (1998): *La politica economica italiana 1968-1998*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, pp. 94-97.

⁷⁷ See for example Ciampi, Carlo Azeglio (2010): *Da Livorno al Quirinale. Storia di un italiano*, Bologna, il Mulino, pp. 143-166.



avowed sceptical of the EMU and a supporter of Margaret Thatcher's position on the European integration. However the Berlusconi cabinet was a very brief episode and on its resignation, most European opinion makers opined that his political career had already reached its end. On the occasion of the general elections held in 1996 the centre-left coalition, the "olive tree", led by Romano Prodi, a professor of Economics at the University of Bologna, former Chairman of the IRI state corporation and a left-wing Christian Democrat, came to power. Actually a strong commitment to the Europeanist ideals was the most important unifying factor in the centre-left coalition, composed by former left-wing Christian Democrats, former Communists and "liberals" coming from former small lay parties. Especially among the former Christian Democrats a central role was played by some technocrats and intellectuals, who had always been the standard-bearers of the European integration, while for the former Communists the European choice, which had its roots in the Berlinguer era was the evidence of the their full and sincere "conversion" to western ideals.

The Prodi government's main goal was Italy's participation to the new European currency and through a rigid fiscal policy the Italian cabinet was able to comply with the Maastricht criteria. The centre-left coalition was able to mobilise the majority of the Italian public opinion through the catchword of "Italy must join Europe". This period can be viewed as the climax of Italy's European commitment: the European choice became both an international and a domestic issue and numerous Italians were convinced that "Europe", whatever it meant, was the model for Italy and the involvement in the European integration process would favour the solution to the crisis which was threatening Italy's international role and domestic balance; everything "European" was pictured in a positive way by the media and most "liberal" opinion-makers and intellectuals, who strongly contributed to the spreading of the European ideal among large sectors of the Italian population, although the European choice began to overlap with the policy of the centre-left coalition⁷⁸. On the contrary some vague form of euro-scepticism began to surface in the centre-right opposition, especially in the Northern League, which in its infancy had favoured the European Community as a safeguard to regional claims and by the late 1990s began to criticise Brussels "centralism" and the "politically correctness" of the EU institutions' jargon⁷⁹. In spite of that in Brussels the centre-left experience was favourably viewed and it is not surprising that Romano Prodi, no longer Prime Minister, would become President of the European Commission after the crisis of the Santer presidency. Such an appointment can be regarded as the most evident recognition of Italy's contribution to the European construction and of the Italian commitment to the European ideals, which appeared to be widespread, not only among the members of the political class, but also in the Italian society⁸⁰.

In 2001 the centre-right and Berlusconi came back to power. Such an event led to a troubled period in the relationship between Italy and the EU and to a change in the Italian attitude towards the European construction. The small but influential group of opinion-makers, EU top officials, EU Members of Parliaments and media which concur in forming the "European" opinion almost immediately developed a negative evaluation of the Berlusconi government, which was often pictured as influenced by racism, led by a leader "unfit to govern", and hostile to the values of the European integration, as they were perceived in Brussels. Berlusconi had tried to balance such a negative attitude through the appointment as Foreign Minister of Renato Ruggero, a former diplomat and top European official, whose

⁷⁸ Varsori (2010), "La Cenerentola ...", *op. cit.*, pp. 375-389.

⁷⁹ Piermattei, Massimo: "Più lontani da Roma e più vicini all'Europa": la Lega Nord e l'integrazione europea (1988-1998)", in Di Sarcina, Federica; Grazi, Laura and Scichilone, Laura (eds.) (2008): *Europa vicina e lontana. Idee e percorsi dell'integrazione europea*, Florence, Centro Editoriale Toscano, pp. 113-124.

⁸⁰ Prodi, Romano (2008): *La mia visione dei fatti. Cinque anni di governo in Europa*, Bologna, il Mulino.



Europeanist record would be destined to reassure the Brussels milieu. But in a few months Ruggiero resigned from office for serious difference of opinions which opposed him to Berlusconi and the majority of the Cabinet. Moreover Berlusconi's reactions to European criticism usually worsened Italy's image in Brussels as well as in other European capitals. Last but not least Berlusconi's pro-US choice on the occasion of the second Iraqi war further embittered the relations between Italy and the two major member states of the EU. France and Germany. In spite of that the Berlusconi cabinet was not euro-sceptic at least in principle; on the contrary the centre-right coalition was eager to achieve some outstanding diplomatic success in the European context; so the Italian authorities did their best in order to play some role in the negotiations which would lead to the constitutional treaty and especially Gianfranco Fini and Franco Frattini, who were the heads of the Italian Foreign Ministry were eager to be regarded in Brussels as "good Europeans", while Berlusconi strongly claimed Italy's aspiration at hosting the signature of the new treaty. In spite of those efforts the European choice had become a source of strong division and continuing contrasts in the domestic political debate, which had obvious negative consequences in the EU milieu and contributed to the uncertainty and weakness of Italy's position in Brussels. So, in spite of Berlusconi's boasting, his government's European record was usually regarded as a negative one by foreign commentators. On the other hand it is not surprising that for the first time some form of euro-scepticism began to spread in the Italian public opinion, at least among the supporters of the centre-right coalition, especially the Northern League⁸¹.

In 2006 the centre-left won the general elections and although with a very slight parliamentary majority Romano Prodi was able to form a new government. Such a cabinet however was very weak and it was destined to last less than two years. In spite of a renewed and convinced commitment to the Europeanist ideals, it is difficult to state that the new Prodi cabinet was able to exert a strong influence in the European integration, which on the other hand was shaken by the failure of the constitutional treaty and by a growing euro-scepticism which appeared to influence also some traditional pro-European electorates. On the other hand the renewal of the European choice was unable to mend the fences in the centre-left coalition and in 2008, as a consequence of a governmental crisis, the Italian voters were called once again to the polls. As it is well known the centre-right coalition led by Berlusconi won the elections with a large majority. Once again in European milieu new criticism hit Berlusconi, although the political and economic conditions of the European scene were completely different: the EU appears by far weaker and most governments of the EU member-states, usually led by conservative governments, are more worried about the financial crisis rather than of the domestic situations of the Union's partners; Berlusconi is the main target of international criticism but some members of his cabinet, such as Tremonti and Frattini, had been able to achieve some consideration in Brussels, while the centre-left appears divided and the European issue is no longer the main factor of its identity, which is definitely more vague than in the Prodi years. Actually, in spite of Italian leaders' official statements, Italy's role in the European context had suffered during the last decade, although the main issue at stake in Europe is not Italy's European choice but the future of the EU itself. In spite of everything the European choice is still the most important aspect of Italy's foreign policy and the country's international role is still subject to the developments in the European construction.

⁸¹ We still lack an analysis of the European policy pursued by the Berlusconi governments. I draw some interesting information from a Master dissertation, discussed in 2010 under my supervision at the University of Padua by Antonio Pantano.