



DIPLOMATS, POLITICIANS AND FOREIGN POLICY IN POST-WAR ITALY

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Abstract:

The role of diplomacy in post-war Italian foreign policy increased as Italian politics polarized around two mass parties, the Christian Democrats and the Communists, taking their cues respectively from Washington (and the Vatican) and from Moscow. A domestic “diplomatic conspiracy” can be evoked, bent upon preserving and promoting essential foreign policy tenets, with respect to national politicians who, both in government and opposition, reacted to external events rather mechanically, indifferently, half-way between pragmatic expediency and lofty idealism. Unable to express strong national convictions and uncomfot with having to take sides, Italy displayed an inclination for multilateral forums. While holding firm to its international moorings, it indulged in occasional drifts, always dispensing with the need to declare its own vital interests. Even though endowed with broad (at times contradictory) instructions, Italian diplomacy performed quite effectively and credibly in the European Communities, in NATO and towards the ‘third world’, achieving a visibility somewhat higher than the country’s actual influence would have allowed. After the Cold War, the very structure of party politics disintegrated and foreign policy was relegated anew to the background, just when world events accelerated dramatically. Nowadays, Italy finds itself back to square one, and this time without the same type of a safety net from NATO or the EU. Hard choices present themselves to a country suddenly bereft of the clear international coordinates that have kept it going so far. Nevertheless, foreign policy has finally become largely bipartisan. The 919 career diplomats were entrusted with more creative and proactive political tasks than the current ‘economic diplomacy’ that they are presently asked to devote themselves to (supported financially by only 0.23% of the national budget, 0.11% of the GNP). The Secretary General of the Foreign Ministry, Ambassador Massolo, maintains that «with the appropriate mix of realism and long-tem vision», Italian diplomacy should «pursue a stable inclusion of our country in the new equations that are consolidating at the global level»; warning however that «in order to be in Europe, we must be well-structured nationally».

Keywords: Italian Diplomats, Italian Politicians, National Interest.

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**Resumen:**

El papel de la diplomacia en la política exterior italiana de pos-guerra aumentó a medida que la política italiana se fue polarizando alrededor de dos partidos políticos, los democristianos y los comunistas, que seguían respectivamente directivas de Washington (y el Vaticano) y de Moscú. Se puede hablar de una “conspiración doméstica”, destinada a preservar una serie de principios con respecto a los políticos italianos, que tanto desde el gobierno como desde la oposición, reaccionaban de una manera más bien mecánica e indiferente, a medio camino entre el mero pragmatismo y un noble idealismo. Incapaz de expresar fuertes convicciones nacionales y contraria a tomar posturas claras, Italia mostraba una inclinación por los foros multilaterales; mientras se mantenía firmemente asida a sus apoyos internacionales, se permitía divergencias ocasionales, siempre evitando la necesidad de declarar sus intereses vitales. Aun con instrucciones vagas (y a veces contradictorias), la diplomacia italiana lograba actuar con bastante efectividad y credibilidad tanto en las Comunidades Europeas, la OTAN y hacia el “tercer mundo”, logrando una visibilidad superior a la que le habría otorgado su verdadera influencia a nivel mundial. Tras la Guerra Fría, la estructura misma de la política de partidos se desintegró y la política exterior quedó relegada a un segundo plano, justo en el momento en el que los sucesos se aceleraban drásticamente. Hoy en día Italia se encuentra con en la casilla de salida., y esta vez ello sin el tipo de seguridad que la OTAN o la UE proveen. Difíciles decisiones se le presentan a un país súbitamente carente de claros referentes internacionales. Afortunadamente por fin la política exterior se ha convertido en un tema de carácter bi-partisano. A los 919 diplomáticos de carrera se les asignaron tareas diplomáticas más creativas y proactivas que la “diplomacia económica” que es lo que en la actualidad se les está pidiendo (apoyados financieramente con solo 0.23 % del presupuesto nacional, es decir, el 0.11 % del PIB). El Secretario General del Ministerio de Exteriores, el Embajador Massolo, mantiene que “con la mezcla apropiada de realismo y visión a largo plazo, la diplomacia italiana puede “lograr una inclusión estable de nuestro país en las nuevas ecuaciones que se están consolidando a nivel global”, avisando sin embargo que para estar en Europa, debemos estar igualmente bien estructurados a nivel nacional.

Palabras clave: Diplomáticos italianos, políticos italianos, interés nacional.

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Diplomacy has for centuries, to this very day, stitched the Italian nation together. As a matter of fact, diplomatic skills were perfected by Italian city-States in order to deal with each other, settle conflicts and, especially in the case of Genoese and Venetians, open up profitable markets abroad. Unable to wield sufficient power or influence, the many Italies resulting from the disintegration the Roman Empire thus managed to survive, even prosper at times, through negotiation and compromise, in the wake of great historical flows. The unification of Italy was a much celebrated diplomatic achievement, that resulted in a protracted effort to establish the country's identity and position in the international arena.

The role of diplomacy in post-war Italian foreign policy has however been underrated even by national historians, in a country torn apart for a long time by ideological differences, which accounts for the fact that many relevant documents are still locked away. Italian diplomats have since the war plied their trade in isolation, remedying the occasional political shortcomings, improvising at times, but always with an eye on the compass². One of its most eminent personalities, Roberto Ducci, even evoked a domestic 'diplomatic conspiracy' bent upon preserving and promoting essential foreign policy tenets, with respect to national politicians who, both in government and opposition, reacted to external events rather mechanically, indifferently, half-way between pragmatic expediency and lofty idealism.

The young country that emerged a mere 150 years ago was born ideally as a liberal democracy in the best tradition of English political enlightenment, contrary to Bismarck's Germany and Napoleon III's France, let alone Habsburg Austria or Bourbon Spain. Its geo-political situation had however set it apart for centuries from mainstream continental politics, especially after history turned its back on the Mediterranean and its Far Eastern lifeline in order to gaze at the 'New World'. Its DNA was therefore maimed by the imprint of centuries of foreign rule that had turned it into the object of historical developments alien to it: at first the drawn-out rivalries between the Empire and the Papacy (with the resulting national fracture between *Guelphs* and *Ghibellines*), then the very many Wars of Succession between absolute monarchies. Having gradually lost its very sense of national identity (a condition bemoaned as far back as Dante and Machiavelli), surviving as best it could through the fissures of European and world events, it had to extricate itself out of its status of a "mere geographic expression", as Metternich had put it. From the very beginning, therefore, the ambition of the new State was to recover a prominent place in continental equations, a task that soon proved very straining and divisive.

The *Risorgimento* (rebirth) that unified the ancient nation had been a top-down affair, not a groundswell: the product of an intellectual élite³, the so-called 'carbonari', huddling under the banner of an ambitious House of Savoy. Shrewd diplomacy was what Cavour resorted to at the Paris Conference of 1856 ending the Crimean War, where he managed to capitalize on the participation of a small contingent of Piedmontese troops; then enlisting the support of the French monarch against Austria, but also towards the very many local sovereignties and allegiances dividing the peninsula. The "founding fathers" (D'Azeglio, Mazzini, Garibaldi, Cattaneo, Rosmini, Gioberti, De Sanctis, Balbo, Pisacane) were a motley of idealists and adventurers that Cavour skillfully steered in creating a new State. A very disparate nation, that Depretis, Crispi and Giolitti, having to cope with rising social unrest, then tried to reconcile also with the absorption of the emerging socialists and alienated

² Perfetti, Francesco: "Verso i Trattati di Roma. L'europeismo di Palazzo Chigi", *La Comunità Internazionale*, vol. 62, no. 1 (2007), pp. 23-49; Melchionni, Maria Grazia (2004): *Quale domani per questa Europa*, Roma, Studium.

³ Only a tiny fraction of the population then spoke correct Italian.



Catholics, in what came to be known as *trasformismo*, resulting in a mixture of compromises at home and adventurism abroad, as the young country elbowed its way through European big-power politics, especially in the Mediterranean sea and in Africa (Eritrea and Libya).

The geographic and historical divisions, just as the political rift between right and left, have never been properly healed. From different but converging angles, political philosophers, such as Gobetti, Gramsci at both ends of the political spectrum, and Croce from the middle, never succeeded in weaving together the many national strands - North and South (the '*questione meridionale*'⁴), industrial and rural (that massive internal migrations exacerbated), Catholics and lay (the *questione romana*, the remnants of which are still to be felt in the political influence of the Church) - in a coherent civil society. Even the two world wars, with their very different results, did not provide the national patchwork with the much-needed catalyst, exacerbating instead of clarifying national feelings. Shifting alliances before deciding, agonizingly and belatedly, to join the first World War on an 'irredentist' platform, Italy only ended up feeling cheated by the terms decided at the Peace conference (resented as a 'mutilated victory'). Such frustrations contributed to the advent of Fascism, and to a more assertive foreign policy (with further forays in aggressive adventures, such as Corfu and Ethiopia), in a revisionist attitude addressed the world 'haves' while craving their solidarity, until the final disastrous association with Nazi Germany. The Second World War left it panting, yet again hesitant about its identity and place in the world.

Such a succinct historical excursus indicates the very special Italian mould, that continues to obstruct a shared vision of the most appropriate way ahead, and consequently of the means best suited to protect and promote them. A task that post-war Italian diplomacy was saddled with, since national political life was otherwise busy. The country remained fractured, held together by the uneasy truce between two mass parties competing for a heterogeneous electorate. Unable therefore to express strong national convictions and uncomfortable with having to take sides, Italy displayed an inclination for multilateral forums. Which also accounts for the fact that, while holding firm to its international moorings, it indulged in occasional drifts, always dispensing with the need to declare its own vital interests. A behavior that served Italy well while the automatic pilots of European and Atlantic discipline lasted, only to be laid bare when the Cold War ended. The following more elaborate description of Italy's post-war foreign policy should illustrate it with greater accuracy.

With the fall of Fascism and the ensuing armistice in 1943, Italy sought to obtain a treatment more benign than the unconditional surrender that was in store for the vanquished. As the government and the king fled Rome, it befell once again to diplomacy to try and salvage what could from the political ruins. While diplomats in neutral capitals such as Lisbon and Madrid tried to achieve more favorable peace terms (with Croce arguing unsuccessfully that Fascism had been but an unfortunate parenthesis inflicted on the Italian people), the then Secretary General of what was left of the Foreign Ministry, Renato Prunas, even attempted to weaken the Allies' resolve by establishing separate links with Moscow. To no avail, as the Paris Conference imposed its harsh terms. It took all the determination and rhetorical ability of Prime Minister De Gasperi and Foreign Minister Sforza (with the assistance of Stalin's intransigent behavior) to brush aside the rejectionist streak that pervaded the political parties across the board, and persuade the then Constitutional Assembly to ratify the Peace Treaty (supplemented by the most timely De Gasperi-Gruber bilateral agreement that settled the border issue with Austria). Vaccinated by the fascist experience against the

⁴ With its socio-economic backwardness resulting in the infiltration of the *mafia* and conversely, of late, in the emergence of the *Northern League*.



virus of nationalism, the overriding ambition became to extract Italy from international marginalization and even, as Sforza boldly stated, to “encourage other nations to see the bigger picture”⁵. A call echoed by the economist Luigi Einaudi, soon to become the first President of the new Republic: “the only hope to save ourselves as well as others consists in becoming with them, or if need be alone, the standard-bearers of a higher ambition”. The primary role of diplomats being that of imagining the future, the argument was brought home insistently and forcefully by the Ambassadors posted in the main capitals (career diplomats such as Quaroni in Moscow, but also political appointees such as Brosio in Moscow, Tarchiani in Washington and Carandini in London), that the most urgent need for battered Italy was to resist the temptation to remain aloof and instead urgently reintegrate the community of democracies.

The role of diplomacy in post-war Italian foreign policy then increased as Italian politics (after a couple of ‘national unity’ governments) polarized around two mass parties, the Christian Democrats (DC) and the Communists (PCI), taking their cues respectively from Washington (and the Vatican)) and from Moscow, thereby replicating the Cold War division and ossifying the domestic political debate. The PCI was barred from power, and the 30% of votes it consistently reaped joined the almost 8% or so of the extreme right in a political limbo. On the other hand, in a fully proportional electoral system, the DC’s lack of an absolute majority forced it into an unending series of ‘revolving-door’ coalition governments with lesser, basically élite parties. A situation giving rise to what was considered a ‘limping democracy’. The Communists, in control of the trade unions and many local administrations, were able to influence political decision-making: even though their head-on ideological opposition would never take matters to the brink, they preserved a severe ‘nuisance value’, constituting an underlying constraint in foreign policy matters (fundamentally objecting to both NATO and the European Community). When it was all over, fifty years later, Ambassador Sergio Romano put it quite bluntly: “we pretended to speak with the whole world, but we actually spoke with the Italian Communist party, to which we tried to prove that there were also other ways to be democratic, peace-loving and progressive”⁶.

Even though endowed with broad (at times contradictory) instructions, Italian diplomacy performed quite effectively and credibly in the European Communities, in NATO and towards the surrounding ‘third world’, achieving a visibility somewhat higher than the country’s actual influence would have allowed. As already indicated, its twin lodestars were the security linkage with the Atlantic Alliance and the political implications of the European integration process, indispensable domestic catalysts (‘external federative factors’) as they both were. The dedication to both, reflected in the repeated sudden pronouncements and actual (at times decisive) contributions to the common cause, was however diminished by an otherwise erratic and often passive participation in shaping practical decisions and strategies, a contribution that Italian political parties were unable to provide as readily as needed. The role of diplomacy was therefore essential as the political class, while obviously holding the high ground, entrusted it with the gyroscope, i.e. not only with the execution but often also with the practical formulation of Italian foreign policy. In its permanent balancing act between Washington, Brussels and Moscow, towards Eastern Europe, the Arab World and the Mediterranean region. All of which under a multilateral cloak, partially inspired by the American brand of international liberalism that would eventually assemble together the most

⁵ Sforza went as far as to argue that “Italy must become for Europe what the Piedmontese monarchy was for Italy”.

⁶ In his introduction to Gaja, Roberto (1995): *L’Italia nel mondo bipolare*, Bologna, il Mulino, p. 13.



ardent Euro-federalists (Spinelli, La Malfa), Atlanticists (Cossiga, Spadolini), third-world idealists (La Pira, Fanfani), and the ever-present Andreotti.

Left therefore to their own devices, overcoming almost single-handedly the pacifist and neutralist instincts of a battered nation, under the vigorous prodding of President Truman and the Marshall Plan, Italian diplomats set the basic post-war parameters to which the country would thereafter cling: “the Italian diplomatic service became tasked, almost unwillingly, with an avant-garde position - nay, a dragging role - in the post-war Italian political thought”, was how former Secretary General Roberto Gaja put it⁷. Obtaining initially the inclusion in the North-Atlantic Treaty and then engineering, under the decisive impulse of the Schuman-Adenauer-De Gasperi ‘trio’⁸, the Coal and Steel Community under which old European rivalries were buried. Originally left out in the cold from the Brussels Treaty (as, until 1955, from the UN), Italy’s diplomacy threw its lot in very straightforwardly also with the European Defence Community (EDC, that the French Parliament eventually shot down), the Council of Europe, the Western European Union, as well as with the ill-fated Fouchet Plan, all of them in the direction of a more unified political Europe. A series of stepping stones that established a *fait accompli* into which the opposition was thereafter stuck and the whole country could safely prosper in a slow but widely-shared socio-economic progress.

In the post-war reconstruction of a traumatized country, very exposed geo-politically, national strife (at the beginning, even civil war) was averted through constant bargaining and compromise, political patronage and back-door deals, a mixed economy between State capitalism and private inventiveness. Such an indigenous brand of ‘social contract’, possibly the most expensive welfare state in Europe, eventually achieved what was hailed as an ‘economic miracle’. For the very same prevailing domestic purposes, foreign policy contributed in generating the critical mass (and the occasional wake-up call). The Italian nation, in other words, would be brought together not in a top-down fashion, as the founding fathers and then Mussolini would have had it, but from the bottom up, painstakingly, slowly but surely. On the international scene, such an endless consensus-seeking exercise produced the occasional waywardness, never a parting of ways with the indispensable Atlantic and European solidarities.

At times, ill at ease with the strictures of East-West confrontation, in an ‘ecumenical approach’ that suited both the DC and the PCI, Italy muddled through, acquiescing in Brussels’ directions while consorting with a host of different interlocutors and relationships, attempting at times to punch well above its weight. Some unilateral initiatives, however well-meaning, were improvised, unpredictable, untimely, insufficiently prepared, in the end irrelevant to the course of events. Rome was in any case mostly concerned with never being left out of any restricted group such as the Paris-Bonn-London trio, the G7 or other ‘directorates’, not only for reasons of national pride but essentially in order not to lose the external pegs indispensable to the cohesion of a fragile domestic political environment. At the same time, ironically, Italy always sought more elbow-room, in the pursuit of a side-agenda reaching out to the ‘left-outs’ of great-power politics, i.e. the Arab World, the newly independent African states, the frail Latin American republics. A ‘third-world’ instinct that belonged to the DNA of both the DC and the PCI.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁸ The three of them Catholics, born and raised in border regions.



The tendency to play at the margins of great-power politics was even theorized by the Christian Democrats Fanfani and Moro⁹ and the Socialist Nenni as the need to recognize “existing realities” (the “emerging countries”, one would say nowadays). Reaching out to communist China, North Vietnam and North Korea, opposing intransigently Pinochet’s Chile, openly supporting *détente* with Eastern Germany and Soviet Russia during their most critical moments. Such waywardness proved however in the end mostly declaratory, as the country was unable to sustain it single-handedly. These occasional shifts in attitude or emphasis were attributable not only to the vagaries of international navigation and to Italy’s geo-political overexposure, but also to specific political personalities playing to different domestic audiences. Additionally, especially with respect to the Arab world, there were, and still are, obvious economic considerations, inaugurated by the ‘oil-diplomacy’ of Mattei’s ENI well before the crisis of 1973.

No wonder that Italian diplomats proved more influential in multilateral contexts such as the protracted European integration process or the CSCE negotiations, which proceeded by steady accumulation and thrived with multiple contributions. Some¹⁰ deem that Italy’s role was seldom acknowledged and rewarded, thus giving rise to a “Cinderella” syndrome: the impression of considered a free-rider, a junior partner, taken for granted, not consulted, a consumer rather than a producer of continental policies. Others¹¹ have instead described how Italian diplomacy often contributed the additional element indispensable to the overall critical mass. Even though the exertions of Italian diplomacy have seldom been capitalized upon by political parties always otherwise engaged, they have in fact proved instrumental in more than one critical occasion: under Gaetano Martino’s careful guidance in the Messina Conference that opened the way for the Rome Treaties in 1957, after the Suez crisis that had thrown Europeans in disarray; with Aldo Moro promoting the drawn-out pan-European process that led to the Helsinki Final Act and eventually brought down the Berlin wall; with Emilio Colombo persuading the European Council, in 1980 in Venice, to back Palestinian self-determination and association with the Middle Eastern negotiations; and then engineering the ‘Luxemburg compromise’ that solved the French ‘empty chair’ attitude and, with Dieter Genscher, opening the way for the Single European Act leading to the ‘Declaration on the European Union’; with Bettino Craxi, at the Milan European Council in 1985, overcoming the British attitude and stimulating European integration; not to mention the decisive impulse that Italy provided to the establishment of the International Criminal Court. Initiatives taken in quite different circumstances, that Italian diplomacy was called upon to prepare, promote and sustain in European, Trans-Atlantic, Mediterranean and broader environments, not always responsive or cohesive. Back in 1957, the *New York Times* observed that “Italian politics, which are always complicated, are now going through some complex maneuvers ... solving these problems in a lively but democratic manner”. Nothing much has changed, it seems. As the following chronology may indicate.

In the late 1950s and 1960s, as the Italian Republic’s politics took root, a succession of leaders, albeit with different emphases and motivations, ensured a steady if subdued stream of contributions to the European and Atlantic common causes. Which did not prevent the President of the Republic Giovanni Gronchi to try his hand at great-power politics,

⁹ For Moro, somewhat philosophically, “growth could also result in decay and death”.

¹⁰ Most recently, Perissich, Riccardo (2008): *L’Unione Europea; una storia non ufficiale*, Milano, Longanesi, and Varsori, Antonio (2010): *La Cenerentola d’Europa? L’Italia e l’integrazione europea dal 1946 ad oggi*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino.

¹¹ Most notably Ducci, Roberto (2007): *Le speranze d’Europa*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino; more recently, Fagiolo, Silvio (2009): *L’idea dell’Europa nelle relazioni internazionali*, Milano, Franco Angeli; see also Albonetti, Achille (2005): *L’Italia, la politica estera e l’unità dell’Europa*, Roma, Edizioni Lavoro.



intervening openly in East-West relations, to little practical avail and some international embarrassment. Prime Minister Fanfani and Foreign Minister Pella then experimented with what was labeled “neo-Atlanticism”, essentially an early (too early?) attempt at *détente*, also reaching out to the newly decolonized States and to the Palestinians, not to mention an ill-conceived attempt at mediating with Hanoi¹². In foreign policy, Prime Minister Aldo Moro went as far as to announce at the 1969 UN General Assembly an “Italian peace doctrine”, equivocally at odds with European and Atlantic solidarity. Even though, as Amb. Quaroni back then firmly stated, “Italy, probably the only country sincerely pro-European among the (then) Six, refuses to follow a European policy that may be perceived as anti-Atlantic or anti-American”¹³.

The 1970s saw the first center-left governments and the gradual emergence of Enrico Berlinguer’s ‘eurocommunism’, with the resulting siren-calls for ‘historical compromises’, ‘national solidarity’, “converging parallels” and other such verbal contortions, that raised eyebrows in NATO, Bonn and even Moscow (but eventually, in 1973, produced the PCI’s formal acceptance of the implications of both the EC and NATO). All of which in the midst of the terrorist upheaval of the Red Brigades and their Black equivalents, that exposed a deep rift in Italian political life (and led to the murder of Moro). Two important achievements were however reached, both in 1975: bilaterally, the ‘Osimo agreement’ with Yugoslavia which settled (without healing) what had long been an open wound along the North-West border and boosted Tito’s non-aligned stance; and multilaterally, in the same spirit of East-West reconciliation and encouragement, the Helsinki Final Act. Full credit for the latter must be given to the skillful persistence of Italian diplomacy, especially in adding the “third basket” (i.e. human dimension) provisions, in close cooperation with the delegation of the Holy See (under Paul VI’s *Ostpolitik*) and of neutral Switzerland. Serendipitously, Moro’s signature on the Final Act was affixed also on behalf of the European Community, which he was then chairing; which constituted the first tangible expression of the much vaunted European political cooperation.

It was only in the 1980s, as the international going got rougher, that governments of a new generation (successively led by Christian-Democrat Francesco Cossiga, Republican Giovanni Spadolini and finally Socialist Bettino Craxi) took a more decisive attitude to foreign policy matters, starting with the sending of a peacekeeping contingent to Lebanon (the first Italian non-UN led post-war overseas military mission), then concurring crucially with Germany in the ‘double decision’ on intermediate nuclear missiles. It was however Craxi¹⁴ that utilized foreign policy in a more extensive and assertive fashion, partly as an additional instrument to break apart the DC-PCI logjam. Unfazed by the ‘Achille Lauro/Sigonella’ incident with Washington (soon overcome), Craxi’s determination proved decisive in restarting a stalled European integration process, developing parallel avenues of dialogue in the Middle East, sending the Italian military ‘East of Suez’ with a flotilla of minesweepers in the Persian Gulf, and accepting the transfer to Southern Italy of NATO’s Torrejon air-base evicted by the Spanish government. Such an unusual foreign policy activism from the Prime Minister’s office sent shockwaves throughout the Italian system, scattering the acquired habits of political parties and bureaucrats alike. Deprived of its prominent role, the Foreign Ministry became vulnerable to conflicting political allegiances that gravely affected its professional cohesion, and the very effectiveness of the whole.

¹² Leading to the resignation of the Ambassador in Washington, Sergio Fenoaltea, the last of the post-war breed of political appointees in Italian diplomacy.

¹³ Quaroni, Pietro (1966): *Problemi della politica del nostro tempo*, Milano, Garzanti, p. 154.

¹⁴ In coalition with DC’s Andreotti as Foreign Minister and the Republican Party’s Spadolini in charge of Defence.



In the 1990s, with the end of the Cold War, a new stage was set. The collapse of the Yugoslav federation brought about another burst of Italian foreign policy activism, spurred by the personalities of Minister Gianni De Michelis (Socialist) and Beniamino Andreatta (Christian-democrat), not influentially enough to avert the bloody aftermath. A short-lived phase, stopped in its tracks by renewed fierce domestic infighting that went under the misleading name of 'clean hands'. The very structure of party politics, the parties themselves, disintegrated and foreign policy was relegated anew to the background, just when world events accelerated dramatically, and the European Union finally emerged in Maastricht, Amsterdam and Laeken. A non-politician closely connected to the leftwing Christian-Democrats, Romano Prodi, was entrusted with a government essentially bent upon not losing ground with the leading pack, deciding therefore single-handedly to reinforce UNIFIL in Lebanon and managing even to bring the country into the 'Euro'. Bold decisions that were not followed-through with the dedication that the concurrent qualitative leaps in the EU would have required¹⁵. In a world transformed, Italian diplomats found themselves once again with little guidance from above, having however lost in the meantime much of their adrenalin. They shifted into an 'overdrive' gear, always useful of course but not as inspiring or creative as in their best days.

Nowadays Italy finds itself back to square one, and this time without the same type of a safety net from NATO or the EU. Hard choices present themselves to a country suddenly bereft of the clear international coordinates that have kept it going so far; some old facts of life will need to be faced. Fortunately, foreign policy has finally become bipartisan, so much so that the first government led by a former Communist, Massimo D'Alema, actively contributed to the military operations on Serbia (not without some ambiguities that persisted afterwards), even in the absence of a Security Council Resolution. An Atlantic reflex that resurfaced during the Iraq crisis in 2003, after Schroeder and then Chirac dramatically broke ranks for narrow national considerations. There is however no blueprint to go by anymore. In an enlarged Europe, where the Union and individual States are not in contradiction with each other but could instead usefully reinforce the respective credibility, Italy finds itself in the predicament of having to elaborate a more precise national identity and vital interests. The European act, with the reshaping of the Franco-German relationship, the UK challenge, the institutional dilemma between 'deepening' and 'enlargement', the many newcomers, the challenges raised by the Lisbon Treaty's 'structured reinforced cooperation' and more coherent common foreign policy, will all require a more active national participation

More than ever, Rome will therefore have to weigh the respective merits of the EU and NATO, with the greater leeway they have both acquired. Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, not immune to the populist streak that pervades the world scene, has appeared consistently more sensitive to the American connection. Which is how Italian politics always reacted, ever since the immediate post-war years, whenever Italy found itself off-balance or isolated in Europe. All the more so nowadays when America relies increasingly on bilateral partnerships, since the EU is still struggling with its ESDP. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, irrespective of the various governments, Italy has readily contributed to peace-support or straightforward military operations, in the Balkans, Timor, the Gulf, Iraq, Afghanistan, underlining their 'humanitarian' rather than strategic relevance, seeking the acquiescence rather than the support of public opinion. Italy has thus become the third contributor to

¹⁵ Membership of the Euro failed to spur structural economic reform, and the Vice Chairmanship of the European Convention awarded to Giuliano Amato did not stimulate the more active national contributions that the EU reform process would have suggested.



international peacekeeping operations, with more than 10,000 troops overall deployed in 21 countries.

In the process, Italian diplomats have found an additional role, unusual for them, joining the military as agents of foreign policy in the new international environment. For both, the mere fact of being there, on the ground, reliably, whenever needed, constitutes in itself a statement of responsible foreign policy. If only the 919 officials of the Foreign Ministry were entrusted with more creative and proactive political tasks than the ‘economic diplomacy’ they are presently asked to devote themselves to (supported financially by only 0.23% of the national budget, 0.11% of the GNP). Yet, the Foreign Ministry should invest more energy (and officials) in the machinery of international organizations, avoiding to find itself short of candidates when asked. As was blatantly the case with the recent enrolment into Lady Ashton’s European own diplomatic corps (indicating the extent to which a new generation of national diplomats should be more appropriately selected and trained).

All of which indicates how much ground Italian diplomacy still needs to cover, while domestic political parties lag in sorting themselves out. Keeping in mind furthermore the present uncharted international territory, where foreign policy has become very much a matter of individual personalities and Summit meetings, showcasing the ambitions of an increasing number of would-be protagonists, to a great extent away from the expert care of diplomats. Which may not be a good thing, especially for a country like Italy that does not benefit from international overexposure. All the more so since Italian politicians, instead of taking the high ground in the much needed reshaping of international relations (which they very well could), still seem to rely on ‘personal diplomacy’ with some of the ‘mavericks’ such as Putin, Gadhafi or Erdogan, and ‘outcasts’ like Lukachenko and Chavez, in pursuit of immediate economic deals if not of far-fetched mediations or mere tactical advantages, seemingly out of step with its allies.

In a globalised world, suddenly out in the open, deprived of its usual moorings, Italy’s foreign policy must finally grow out of its protracted adolescence, and contribute more decisively to international affairs, participating suggesting, stimulating according to its own very specific strategic and political sensitivity. It could even be argued that the EU’s newly-born foreign policy and security ambitions could benefit from a more distinct contribution from its Mediterranean countries (the so-far derided ‘Club Med’), particularly exposed as they are to the intervening transnational challenges of migration flows, illegal trafficking of all kinds, violent extremism, endowed as they are with their ‘Latin’ sensitivity to the heterogeneous and unsettled Southern neighborhood in the Balkans, the Middle East and Africa.

In many respects, Italian foreign policy has so far been the public face of a still adolescent nation, that has at first tragically failed (with Fascism) and then proved unwilling or unable (with two mass-parties locking horns, both of them quite alien to the original *Risorgimento* ideals) to clarify and promote its own national interests. A late-comer in many crucial international situations, but always eager to catch up, with a penchant for building bridges, and seeking mediation and compromise that mirror-image its national fabric, Italy should resort more to the ways and means of multilateral institutions, where its unselfishness could be appreciated, instead of trying to compete for attention with the permanent members of the Security Council or those who aspire to become one (Italy does not¹⁶). An additional

¹⁶ Italy has opposed the creation of new permanent members, formulating proposals for reforming the membership of the Security Council [editor’s note].



soft-power, in other words, could prove very useful in the present ‘post-modern’, rougher international terrain.

Appropriate on-the-job training and exposure to the new international realities will of course be an indispensable part of the much-needed adaptation. The Secretary General of the Foreign Ministry, Ambassador Giampiero Massolo, maintains that, ‘with the appropriate mix of realism and long-term vision’, Italian diplomacy should “pursue a stable inclusion of our country in the new equations that are consolidating at the global level... contributing thereby to the reorganization of the system of international relations”; warning however that “in order to be in Europe, we must be well-structured nationally”¹⁷. A requirement, the latter, that has indeed bedeviled Italian post-war diplomacy. And therefore possibly exalted its qualities.

¹⁷ Massolo, Giampiero, “Fare di più con meno: perchè riformiamo la Farnesina”, *Limes*, July 2010.

