

# Making sense of a changing world: foreign policy ideas and Italy's national role conceptions after 9/11

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In a rapidly changing world, middle powers with no obvious role to play on the global stage have the difficult task to read the international environment in order to formulate and implement a coherent and possibly effective foreign policy. In order to do so, decision makers either reproduce old ideas or develop new ones. Considering the ideas put forward in their inaugural speeches by Prime Ministers and Foreign Affairs Ministers in office after 2001, we suggest that Italy's institutional actors appear to be aware of the changes occurred in the international system after 1989, and in particular after 9/11. The national role conceptions sustaining Italy's present foreign policy goals reflect such awareness, being quite different with respect to the picture offered by Holsti in his seminal work published in 1970. Ideas expressing foreign policy goals are also reasonably well grounded in ideas on how the world works or linked to operational ideas, yet the country's foreign policy appears feebly focused, even though focus is explicitly very much sought for. Some explanations for such a lack of focus which makes Italy's foreign policy design rather ineffective are offered.

**Keywords:** Italy; foreign policy; middle power; ideas; national role conceptions; change

## Introduction

In a well-known article, John Ravenhill (1998: 310–313) identifies in five 'C-words' the key to success of middle powers' foreign policy: capacity, concentration, creativity, coalition-building, and credibility. Possessing limited – albeit far from insignificant – capacities, middle powers can in fact play a role in the international arena if their foreign policy is adequately focused, if their leadership can draw on new ideas to make up for the narrowness of material resources, and if they are able to build coalitions, an activity which requires a defined agenda supported by a credible promoter.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Three other 'Cs' – context, content, and choice – are supposed to matter more for middle powers than for great powers, since 'foreign policy behaviours [...] are constrained not only by their resources but also by the systemic context and by the balance of domestic interests' (Ravenhill, 1998: 321). Foreign policy choices available to Italy were for instance the object of a study conducted by a group of eminent scholars and practitioners a few years ago (Dassù and Massari, 2008).

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Ravenhill's recipe nicely applies to Italy, a middle power<sup>2</sup> facing the challenges posed by a highly dynamic, global and regional, post-1989 context while being constrained by a quite severe scarcity of resources (Isernia, 2017; Higgott, 1997), and for this very reason in search of consistency, in D'Alema's words of 'a foreign policy of the country, not only of a government' (2007). A consistent foreign policy, though, requires an articulated and coherent reading of the international political environment matched by a clear conception of the role<sup>3</sup> the country wants to play within it, supporting specific goals and consequential policy instruments. Establishing whether Italian institutional actors have expressed such vision after 2001 is the aim of the research.

The speeches stating their intentions in front of the Parliament at the beginning of the mandate delivered by the Prime Ministers and Ministers of Foreign Affairs in office after 2001 have thus been searched through for ideas conveying such vision. The fundamental question is whether Italy's reading of the international political environment has integrated the changes occurred in the international system after 'the end of the illusion of *belle époque* of the 1990s' (Gentiloni, 2015).<sup>4</sup> This is in fact a requirement for goals to be realistic – that is, sufficiently focused and intrinsically coherent, as well as reasonably achievable given the resources of different sorts which the country can mobilize.

Mapping the ideas on 'how the world works' (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993) put forward by the decision makers will be the first, essential step in order to establish if Italy has developed a distinct reading of the post-2001 international environment. A connection between foreign policy goals as expressed through normative ideas (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993) and 'national role conceptions' (NRC) will then be established in order to find out if, and in case how, Italy has updated its self-conception as an international actor in consequence of both the abrupt and the incremental changes which took place after the end of the Cold war and in particular after 9/11. This part builds on the pioneering work of Hosti (1970) who, almost 50 years ago, analyzed the foreign policy discourse of

<sup>2</sup> The debate around Italy's middle power status is longstanding and articulated. Some would argue that – albeit relatively weak – Italy is a middle power (Andreatta, 2001; Chelotti, 2010), while others would underline the reality of an 'aspiring' middle power (Giacomello and Bertjan, 2011). A consistent foreign policy meeting Ravenhill's 5-Cs criteria may well contribute to closing the gap between Italy's self-perception as a middle power and the more dubious peer perception pointed out by Giacomello and Bertjan (2011).

<sup>3</sup> We assume the following definition of role: 'a coherent set of "norms" of behavior which are thought by those involved in the interactions being viewed, to apply to all persons who occupy [the same] position ... The concept postulates that [individuals] are aware of the norms constituting the role and consciously adapt their behavior to them in some fashion' (Wahlke *et al.* (1962: 8–9) quoted in Holsti, 1970: 238).

<sup>4</sup> As required in parliamentary democracies such as Italy, Prime Ministers ask – through a speech delivering an action plan – the Parliament for a vote of confidence. Usually, Ministers of Foreign Affairs deliver – in the following weeks – an inaugural speech in a joint session of the two commissions of External Affairs of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. During his mandate, D'Alema delivered a second formal speech on his foreign policy directives. In this case, two documents have been considered (2006, 2007).

several countries – including Italy – to find out if they had framed NRCs for themselves and if NRC idealtypes stood out.

We shall then focus on the consistency of Italian foreign policy design. First, we consider to what extent the different NRCs Italy has developed are consistent with the worldviews expressed by Foreign Affairs Ministers. As a second step, following Goldstein and Keohane's (1993) suggestion, we shall observe if foreign policy goals (i.e. normative ideas) are coherent with worldviews and/or articulated in operational ideas. Should they appear decoupled from (or weakly linked to) both, such goals might in fact represent a mere narrative for the public opinion, thereby giving birth to erratic and quite possibly unproductive foreign policy decisions.

The final step will be evaluating to what extent the present design of Italy's foreign policy will support the capacity of the decision makers to build on Ravenhill's five 'Cs' to deliver a reasonably effective action.

### Searching for ideas

While addressing the debate over rationality vs. cognition in foreign policy analysis is beyond the scope of this article (Rosati, 2000), the centrality assigned to ideas implies that they are assumed to be part of the foreign policy-making process (Brighi, 2007). In particular ideas held by decision makers are thought to simplify and structure the outside environment (George, 1980), influencing foreign policy goals and means. Since the research focuses on the *design* of Italian foreign policy after 2001 rather than its implementation, the impact of ideas on outcomes (in general or relative terms) does not need to be assessed here.

Our search for ideas has been guided by Goldstein and Keohane's (1993) tripartition. For the two scholars, at the level of world views, 'ideas define the universe of possibilities for action' (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993: 8). Ideas of this kind are labeled 'scientific' as they are supposed to capture 'how the world works'. While being aware that this label is questionable since such ideas are obviously influenced by ideology, political attitudes, beliefs, past experience, etc., for the purpose of this study it is important to be able to distinguish between conceptions of the world environment influencing decisions (the so called 'scientific ideas') and foreign policy goals – Goldstein and Keohane's 'normative ideas'.

Normative ideas 'mediate between world views and particular policy conclusions [as] they translate fundamental doctrines into guidance for contemporary human action' (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993: 9). For our purpose, normative ideas set foreign policy goals which can be seen as consequentially linked – even though this may not always be the case in practice – to scientific ideas posing that 'since the world works like this, then the proper policy objective is ...'.

Finally, operational ideas convey policy prescriptions related to scientific and normative ideas through causal relationships: 'Causal beliefs imply strategies for the attainment of goals, themselves valued because of shared principled beliefs, and

understandable only within the context of broader world views' (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993: 10).

This tripartition guided the search for ideas in the speeches of the nine Italy's Foreign Affairs Ministers and the seven Italy's Prime Ministers in office since 2001, both from the centre-right (R) and the centre-left (L). In every speech, scientific, normative, and operational ideas were singled out. Scientific ideas on 'how the world works' (Table 1) have then been regrouped in nine 'macro-ideas', on the basis that ideas articulated in slightly different ways and with reference to various foreign policy issues or regional settings may in fact convey the same vision of the world. Prime Ministers' speeches turned out to mostly corroborate and only much less frequently integrate the findings coming from the more focused Foreign Affairs Ministers' speeches.

As a second step, normative ideas stating foreign policy goals have been isolated and subsequently regrouped in internally coherent sets that either appear to be expression of Italy's longstanding NRCs (Holsti, 1970) or point to new ones (Table 2). Italy's present NRCs have then been matched with the nine (scientific) macro-ideas on how the world works in order to evaluate if the overall present conception of Italy's role in the world is coherent with decision-makers' reading of the international environment (Table 3).

Finally, normative ideas regrouped as foreign policy goals are considered in relation to both scientific and operational ideas. If they stand alone or are weakly linked 'upstream' to scientific ideas and 'downstream' to operational ideas, stated foreign policy goals are likely to be tantamount to mere narratives directed at the public opinion, in practice contributing very little to the overall design of Italy's current foreign policy.

### **How the world works for Italy's Foreign Affairs Ministers**

Italy's Foreign Affairs Ministers programmatic speeches contain manifest ideas which, duly integrated by Prime Ministers' views, convey a distinct reading of the international environment of the time. The recurrence of some ideas on how the world works (Table 1) highlights the specificity of such a reading, making it possible to establish whether decision makers have (or have not) integrated the transformations occurred in world politics after 2001 in their foreign policy outlook.

Regrouping the large number of scientific ideas which – although differently articulated – convey the same core reading of the international environment, nine macro-ideas stand out: (1) the international system is complex and dynamic, presenting new challenges and threats; (2) globalization creates opportunities; (3) a power shift is occurring; (4) the EU can make the difference in world politics; (5) the transatlantic partnership is a pillar of global governance; (6) multilateralism is the cornerstone of world order; (7) effective multilateralism entails state responsibility; (8) democracy fosters security and development; (9) setting priorities is crucial for middle powers.

Table 1. How the world works for Italy's Foreign Affairs Ministers, 2001–15: nine (scientific) macro-ideas and their recurrence in inaugural speeches

	Ruggiero (2001) (R)	Frattini (2003) (R)	Fini (2004) (R)	D'Alema (2006) (L)	D'Alema (2007) (L)	Frattini (2008) (R)	Terzi (2011) (-)	Bonino (2013) (L)	Mogherini (2014) (L)	Gentiloni (2015) (L)	Total
1. The international system is complex and dynamic, presenting new challenges and threats	1		3	2	1		1	2	2	1	13
2. Globalization creates opportunities	1							1		1	3
3. A power shift is occurring				2		1	1				4
4. The EU can make the difference in world politics			2	1	2	1	1				7
5. The transatlantic partnership is a pillar of global governance			2		1						3
6. Multilateralism is the cornerstone of world order	3		1	2	3				2		11
7. Effective multilateralism entails state responsibility				1	3		1		1	1	7
8. Democracy fosters security and development			1	1	1				1		4
9. Setting priorities is crucial for middle powers		1				2	1	2		1	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>59</b>

R = centre-right government; L = centre-left government.

As a first very general observation, it stands out that there is no clear distinction between ideas expressed by ministers from centre-left (L) and from centre-right (R) governments,<sup>5</sup> with a notable exception, represented by idea no. 7, 'effective multilateralism entails state responsibility'. In fact, this concept was initially formulated by D'Alema (2006, 2007), who served in a government supported by a broad left-of-the-centre coalition (led by former President of the European Commission Romano Prodi) after the European divisions provoked by the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. This idea is therefore highly situated in that peculiar time, but it then gained ground in Italy's foreign policy discourse.

The rather consistent reading of world politics put forward by Italian decision makers can be more effectively presented and discussed by moving from the nine macro-ideas just mentioned to four thematic subsets. The first revolves around new challenges, threats, and opportunities in the international system (ideas no. 1, 2, and 3). A second subset includes ideas on Italy's historical partnerships with the EU and the US (ideas no. 4 and 5). The third is about international order/democratic peace (ideas no. 6, 7, and 8). Idea no. 9 – regarding method rather than substance – reflects the need to set priorities, given Italy's limited resources (Romero, 2016). Not unexpectedly this idea often appears in connection with the first subset, as Foreign Affairs Ministers state that middle powers cannot cope simultaneously with all the challenges posed by a complex and rapidly evolving international system.

The first subset of ideas in fact highlights the widespread perception of a changing international system, which offers opportunities but also poses new challenges and threats. All Foreign Affairs Ministers mention this mixed picture with the exception of one in both his mandates (Frattini, 2003, 2008), making it the most recurrent (albeit

<sup>5</sup> Terzi, serving in Professor Monti's government, was a career diplomat with no party affiliation. That no clear distinction is to be found in ideas expressed from Ministers with different political orientation is supported by Croci (2007, 2008) who stresses how, even on the issue of the transatlantic partnership, the positions expressed are very similar, leading to a considerable continuity through time.

Table 2. From normative ideas to Italy's old and new national role conceptions (NRC) in the inaugural speeches of Italy's Foreign Affairs Ministers, 2001–15

National role conceptions	Ruggiero (2001) (R)	Frattini (2003) (R)	Fini (2004) (R)	D'Alema (2006) (L)	D'Alema (2007) (L)	Frattini (2008) (R)	Terzi (2011) (-)	Bonino (2013) (L)	Mogherini (2014) (L)	Gentiloni (2015) (L)	Total
<b>Holsti (1970)</b>											
1. Mediator/integrator			4	1	2	1	2	2	1	2	15
2. Regional/subsystem collaborator			4	2	1	3	1	2	1		14
3. Developer	2	1		1	2	1	2	1	2		12
4. (Faithful) ally				1	1	1	1				4
<b>Caffarena and Gabusi (2017)</b>											
5. Bridge <sup>a</sup>		3	1	1			1				6
6. The effective multilateralist/ responsible state	2		3	1		3	1		3		13
7. Globalization surfer/ economic networker		1	1	2	1	1	3	3			12
8. Cultural power		1					1				2
9. Principled actor				2	2	2	2		1	1	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>88</b>

<sup>a</sup>Bridge as an idealtpe was put forward by Holsti but not applied to Italy.

Table 3. Exploring the link between national role conceptions (NRC) and macro-ideas on how the world works to be found in the inaugural speeches of Italy’s Foreign Affairs Ministers, 2001–15

National role conceptions	Macro-ideas								Total
	1. The system is complex and dynamic	2. Globalization creates opportunities	3. Power Shift is occurring	4. The EU can make the difference	5. US–EU alliance as a pillar	6. Multilateralism cornerstone of world order	7. Multilateralism entails responsibility	8. Democracy fosters security/development	
<b>Holsti (1970)</b>									
1. Mediator/integrator	+						+		2+
2. Regional/subsystem collaborator	+		+	+	+				4+
3. Developer	+						+		3+
4. (Faithful) ally	–		–	–				+	3–
<b>Caffarena and Gabusi (2017)</b>									
5. Bridge	+				+				2+
6. The effective multilateralist/responsible state	+		+	+		+	+		5+
7. Globalization surfer/economic networker	+	+	+						3+
8. Cultural power		+							1+
9. Principled actor							+	+	2+
<b>Total</b>	<b>6 +/1–</b>	<b>2+</b>	<b>3 +/ 1–</b>	<b>2 +/1–</b>	<b>2+</b>	<b>1+</b>	<b>4+</b>	<b>2+</b>	<b>22 +/3–</b>

<sup>a</sup>Idea no. 9 ‘Setting priorities is crucial’ is not included as it is fundamentally methodological.

+ the macro-idea reinforces the NRC; – the macro-idea weakens the NRC.

somehow superficial) idea with its 13 appearances. On the other hand, only three ministers explicitly refer to changes brought about by globalization as (mainly economic) opportunities for the country. If we integrate the picture with the ideas put forward by Prime Ministers in their speeches though, power shift (Letta, 2013; Renzi, 2014) and ‘globalization as opportunity’ (Prodi, 2006) emerge as significant drivers of change in world politics (Stephen, 2013). Indeed, this more encouraging view may be due to Prime Ministers’ wider vision on world affairs and more articulated conception of the country’s interests, which today may well entail a significant economic component.

Moving to the second subset focused on partnerships, Table 1 apparently shows the persistence of two classic anchor points of Italy’s foreign policy – namely the European Union and the transatlantic alliance with the United States. While expressing uncompromising loyalty to the European Union project and to the transatlantic alliance has been a constant of Italy’s foreign policy for decades, ideas no. 4 and 5 point to a slightly different approach to such partnerships. This is apparently due to the fact that they are now seen through the lens of effective global governance as a crucial foreign policy goal. Regarding the EU, Italian Foreign Affairs Ministers worry about the risk it runs to be ineffective if it is not sufficiently cohesive and coherent: in a more fragmented international system, this could lead to its marginalization (see for instance, D’Alema, 2007). Moreover, a weaker EU would generate a permanent power asymmetry in the transatlantic partnership, diminishing the EU role in global governance (for instance, Frattini, 2008: 8 is less concerned about US strength than Europe’s weakness). In other words, Italian Foreign Affairs Ministers do no longer appear to regard the European integration process and the transatlantic partnership simply as anchor points to the West for the country, as it were during the Cold war, but as two fundamental sources of global governance. For this reason they are no longer a value in themselves, but insofar as they prove capable of carrying out this task. So Fini (2004: 7) states that ‘Italy has the ambition and the commitment to press the EU to emerge as a global actor constructively engaging in strategic partnership with the US’ within an effective multilateral system.

At first sight, subset no. 3 (ideas no. 6 and 7) seems not to be revealing anything significant: a reference to multilateralism as the cornerstone of world order was expected, since *as a practice* it has been the guiding idea of Italy’s foreign policy since the end of WWII. However, again an apparent continuity masks undercurrent change since multilateralism appears to have been re-interpreted. In fact, in the speeches multilateralism is not treated as an abstract principle, but rather as a tool to devise and implement effective international public policies.<sup>6</sup> As such, it requires engagement, commitment, and responsibility on the part of the states involved<sup>7</sup> – responsibility that

<sup>6</sup> Even D’Alema’s (2006, 2007) references to the centrality of the UN system reflects more the need to go back to the multilateral table after the end of American unilateralism in the sands of Iraq than a general confidence in the effectiveness of the UN system *per se*.

<sup>7</sup> It is not by accident that ‘responsibility’ has become a recurrent word in world politics and foreign policy discourse after the elaboration of the ‘responsibility to protect’ (ICISS, 2001).



Italy's Foreign Affairs Ministers seem to be willing to take upon themselves, maybe as an instrumental move in obtaining more resources for their Ministry.

Finally, the emphasis on the idea that setting priorities is now crucial (no. 9) reflects the awareness that the increasing complexity of the international environment requires commensurate resources – an idea which has been recurrent since the beginning of the economic crisis (2007–08, see Table 1). Moreover, quite a few speeches offer evidence that decision makers realize that present challenges require an upgrading in foreign policy actions, which only regional actors like the EU can sustain. For instance, according to Frattini (2008: 6), 'Italy is too small': only Europe – as small as it is in front of global giants – can develop the necessary critical mass to have a say on the global stage. Six years later, Mogherini (2014: 5) stresses how thinking globally is no longer a mere option for national decision makers, since regional and global dynamics are more and more interdependent. For a country like Italy – strongly affected by events taking place in the Mediterranean space, stresses Mogherini – acting within the framework of the EU has therefore become unavoidable if achieving policy effectiveness is the crucial aim.

A final observation suggested by the whole set of ideas regards their 'density' in the different speeches. The richest basket of ideas (at least nine, compared with one to six for the other ministers) was put forward by the two most senior political figures: Gianfranco Fini, then leader of National Alliance, the rightist junior partner in Berlusconi's government, and Massimo D'Alema, who served as Prime Minister and was a leader of the *intelligentsia* of the Democratic Party. This wealth of ideas may be due to their stronger ideological background, political standing, and longtime experience, but could also depend on the fact that they happened to serve in a period of dramatic changes and fault lines like the EU enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe and the split between 'old' and 'new' Europe following Washington's decision to invade Iraq.

In fact, by looking at Fini's (2004) and D'Alema's (2006, 2007) ideas we can trace two partially overlapping 'clusters', embracing, respectively, ideas no. 3, 4, 5, and 6, and ideas no. 6, 7, and 8 (Table 1). The focal point of the first is represented by the European and transatlantic pillars of Italy's foreign policy while the second emphasizes state responsibility and democracy promotion as tools to foster security and development, both being connected to the idea that multilateralism is the cornerstone of world order. Since they appeared in a period when American unilateralism tested the resilience of international order (2003–07), they both give evidence of the impact of contingencies (i.e. new significant and disrupting events requiring new ideas), simultaneously showing that for Italy combining effective and inclusive multilateralism was the response to these new challenges.

Concluding, while at a superficial reading speeches may suggest continuity in Italy's view of how the world works, a more in-depth analysis highlights a significant updating of decision-makers' vision of international dynamics. Three pillars of the country's foreign policy – European engagement, the partnership with

the United States and Italy's loyalty toward multilateralism – are reinterpreted by incorporating the changes in terms of growing interconnectedness within the global system and rising challenges, explicitly mentioned by almost all Foreign Affairs Ministers.

### Beyond world views: normative ideas and Italy's NRCs

Among drivers behind foreign policy are NRCs. A NRC 'includes the policymakers' own definitions of the general kinds of decisions, commitments, rules and actions suitable to their state, and of the functions, if any, their state should perform on a continuing basis in the international system or in subordinate regional systems' (Holsti, 1970: 245–246). In search of NRCs driving Italy's foreign policy after 2001, we assume that normative ideas put forward by Foreign Affairs Ministers convey specific NRCs. The move is justified by the fact that normative ideas, which translate general world views into proper foreign policy goals and related commitments (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993: 9), variably include most of NRCs' defining elements mentioned by Holsti.<sup>8</sup> This section is hence devoted to exploring Italy's NRCs by illustrating a number of normative ideas which either confirm old ones or suggest that new ones have recently been developed.

In his seminal 1970 article comparing the NRCs of 71 countries by analyzing the speeches of institutional actors (mainly between 1965 and 1967), Holsti found that Italy took on four different roles for itself:<sup>9</sup> *mediator-integrator*, *regional-subsystem collaborator*, *developer*, and *faithful ally*, the latter being the most recurrently referred to.<sup>10</sup> While *mediator-integrators* 'perceive themselves as capable of, or responsible for, fulfilling or undertaking special tasks to reconcile conflicts between other states or groups of states' (Holsti, 1970: 265), *regional-subsystem collaborators* 'do not merely envisage occasional interposition into areas or issues of conflict; they indicate, rather, far-reaching commitments to cooperative efforts with other states to build wider communities' (Holsti, 1970: 265). *Developers* perceive 'a special duty or obligation to assist underdeveloped countries' (Holsti, 1970: 266), while *faithful allies* reiterate 'specific commitment[s] to support the policies of another government' (Holsti, 1970: 267).

Since Holsti includes *faithful ally* in the NRC category labeled 'cold-war polar', we might expect this NRC to be dismissed by Italy in the post-2001 fragmented international sphere. The *regional-subsystem collaborator* and *mediator-integrator* NRCs, included in the 'subsystem-oriented independent category', should still be

<sup>8</sup> For NRCs conceived as having mainly domestic sources see Holsti (1970: 241–247).

<sup>9</sup> In fact, states tend to perform different roles on the world stage: 'The traditional view that states fulfill essentially a single function or play a single role in international politics is not borne out by the statements of policymakers' (Holsti, 1970: 277).

<sup>10</sup> Holsti analyzed 10 speeches: of them, one presented no conception at all, three showed the role of 'mediator', three showed the role of 'regional-subsystem collaborator', one that of 'developer', and six that of 'faithful ally'.

essential patterns of Italy's foreign policy, given Italy's limited resources and geographical location.<sup>11</sup> After all, this category applies to many countries that might 'become involved in some multilateral and global issues through the United Nations, [but whose] chief concerns are much closer to home' (Holsti, 1970: 291).

In order to establish if a country is a passive or active player in the international arena Holsti attributes a score to each NRC: from zero (very passive, like a protectee) to five (very active, like a bastion of revolution-liberator). Italy's NRCs get a score of three, with the exception of *faithful ally*, that gets a score of two. Not surprisingly then, when Holsti regroups states in four sets according to their being active or passive, Italy turns up in group III, among countries we might label 'upper passive'. To sum up, in terms of foreign engagement Holsti's analysis hints at a country rather passive in the Cold war environment, but with a role to play as a regional collaborator, facilitating reconciliation among conflicting parties, within the undisputed framework of the transatlantic alliance.

Drawing on the analysis of normative ideas extrapolated from the speeches of the Foreign Affairs Ministers in office since 2001, Table 2 shows that, in recent years, Italy has developed five new NRCs to be added to the four singled out by Holsti in 1970, which persist. Four have been inductively created *ex novo* from normative ideas: *effective multilateralist/responsible state*, *globalization surfer/economic networker*, *cultural power*, and *principled actor*. The fifth, *bridge*, while not applied to Italy at the time, was one of Holsti's original ideal types.

Holsti (1970) suggested that, as a role, *bridge* is similar to *mediator-integrator*, but while the latter 'implies various forms of diplomatic interposition into areas or issues of conflict, the bridge concept is much more ephemeral', involving instead 'a communication function, that is, acting as a "translator", or conveyor of messages and information between peoples of different cultures' (Holsti, 1970: 265–266). Given its geographical location at the center of the Mediterranean and its history as faithful US ally and co-founder of the European venture, Italy is in fact a perfect candidate to play this role. Not unexpectedly, expressions of this NRC abound, derived from a number of normative ideas such as:

Honorable colleagues, divisions of the Western community are yet too well-known. The lacerating divisions within the same transatlantic community on the Iraqi issue, divisions for which Italy has always worked so as not to let them overcome a critical threshold, should be put behind our shoulders once and for all if we do not want to play into the terrorists' hand (Fini, 2004: 8).

We have to avert the scenario of a clash of civilization between Islam and the West, an extremely dangerous one that would produce only losers without winners, with very high costs in terms of regional destabilization within the same Arab and Islamic world. [...] This is one of the first objectives of Italy's action, which can

<sup>11</sup> 'Regional-subsystem collaborator, mediator-integrator, developer, active independent, and bridge' are also collaboration type roles (Holsti, 1970: 293).

leverage on the re-launch of traditional friendly relationships with the Arab world, which have been somehow steamy in the past few years (D'Alema, 2007: 7).

Then, getting the two shores of the Mediterranean as closer as possible means creating economic opportunities and generating stability (Terzi, 2011: 4).

As we said, other four post-2001 NRCs have been identified and labeled *ex novo*: let us see them in turn. The *effective multilateralist/responsible state* role is played by countries that conceive multilateralism as a powerful tool for responsible states to make global governance work. Since it is not an automatic mechanism, in order to function multilateralism requires meaningful engagement and responsible commitment – in terms of capacity and resources – from each single country involved. This role conception entails an inclusive approach so as to make sure that all relevant actors are on board.

I have been personally convinced for many years [...] that beyond [the G8] a G20 summit must be established. [...] Even this is not a perfect system, but it allows all countries of the world to be represented (Ruggiero, 2001: 9).

Italy strongly believes in international cooperation at all levels, in the first place through the organizations I have just mentioned, as a decisive factor for success. Our belief in multilateralism is not an act of faith in an abstract and self-serving principle: a concrete and effective multilateralism is the most appropriate instrument for affirming and defending our legitimate interests (Fini, 2004: 4).

Being member of international organizations is the structural dimension of Italian foreign policy and it is one of the reasons why our country has a specific interest in improving multilateralism. However, multilateralism does not mean cancellation of national responsibilities. Quite the contrary, effective multilateralism requires the commitment of each single country and international organizations work only on this condition (D'Alema, 2006: 5).

The *globalization surfer/economic networker* NRC is linked to foreign economic policy,<sup>12</sup> and involves two dimensions. First, a *globalization surfer* wants to take advantage of all opportunities that economic interdependence offers, wherever they come up: in order to fulfil this role, a country and its economic system have to 'get ready' for global competition by flexibly riding the waves of globalization and also by widening the traditional horizon of foreign policy. Second, the *economic networker* wants to pursue economic diplomacy (Frattini, 2011) to attract direct foreign investments and support outgoing investments and exports. This role reflects the adherence to the liberal vision of an open global economic order.

Italian foreign policy must learn to articulate itself, more and more, on different and multiple levels. [...] Foreign policy has then a specific and primary role in contributing to make Italy fully fitted to face the rendezvous with globalization in the best way (Fini, 2004: 9).

<sup>12</sup> Which officially became part of Italy's foreign policy only in 2003, with Frattini's inaugural speech.

Let us think of how fundamental is for us to integrate the development of our economy with the sweeping development of the Chinese economy (D'Alema, 2006: 6–7).

We strived to widen the horizons of Italy's international action by looking at great areas of the world that are leading the globalization process, areas towards which Italy had kept in the past few years a distant, sometimes even hostile attitude, considering the challenge of international competition with fear (tariffs) more than with confidence in the possibilities of a great country like Italy (D'Alema, 2007: 14).

Projecting the genius and inventiveness of the *made in Italy* has become a foreign policy task (Frattini, 2008: 14).

First of all, it comes to my mind the issue of *scouting* for economic opportunities to seize [...]. In that sense, we often talk about diplomacy for growth (Bonino, 2013: 9).

The NRC *cultural power* reflects the idea of projecting power and influence through the promotion of national language, historical heritage, movies, music, and arts in general. A *cultural power* is usually aware and proud of its cultural uniqueness and it perceives culture as a significant tool to be deployed to raise the country's standing in the world, since it represents a respected source of contribution to the legacy of the humankind. The NRC of *cultural power* is in fact strictly linked to the NRC based on foreign economic policy, as the promotion of culture is also a vehicle for advertising products and services offered by the country – in fact in our case we think here of a possible 'Made in Italy' effect, recalling the aforementioned quotation in Frattini (2008).

I believe that [cultural policy] constitutes an essential component in foreign policy options and a privileged vehicle for the promotion of our interests (Frattini, 2003: 10).

Italy [...] is first of all a country carrying an immense culture and fundamental values. More and more we must make of our culture a strategic asset, also for the economic effects growing out of it. I am convinced, then, that it is necessary to think in terms of culture economy, which makes culture a flywheel also for the business system (Terzi, 2011: 7).

A *principled actor* – the last of Italy's more recently developed NRCs – is a country that consciously consults its founding principles before acting on the international stage. Like individuals of principles, countries playing this NCR believe that whatever decision, action, or behavior becomes an option, an evaluation of their compatibility with one's defining values is due. Moreover, all policies and initiatives aimed at reaffirming these principles must be granted a privileged focus, even though they might look like marginal acts of 'niche diplomacy' (Cooper, 1997; Henrikson, 1997).

I maintain that human rights protection must have an essential role in a foreign policy that wants to assume, as I believe it is right, a strong ethical connotation (D'Alema, 2006: 18).

I would here assure that human rights promotion [...] will continue to be the true polar star of our international action (Terzi, 2011: 6).

When it comes to Italy's NRCs already identified by Holsti (1970), continuity is rather evident. Italy's role as a *mediator/integrator* is confirmed by our analysis of normative ideas in foreign policy discourse after 2001. As we might expect, recent developments have actually enhanced this role conception. Worsening tensions and conflicts at the country's door put Italy in an uncomfortable position so that mediation turned out to be almost a necessity. Such attitude is strengthened by the fact that the old system of alliances does not seem to be working properly and effectively anymore, thereby making the country feel weaker.

The most-often quoted fault lines of the system where Italy is supposed to play a mediating role concern Russia and the West (see for instance, Fini, 2004; D'Alema, 2007; Frattini, 2008; Terzi, 2011; Mogherini, 2014; Gentiloni, 2015), Israel and Palestine (Fini, 2004; D'Alema, 2007; Terzi, 2011; Bonino, 2013; Mogherini, 2014; Gentiloni, 2015), Iran and the West (Fini, 2004; Bonino, 2013). Occasionally, this NRC is framed in more general terms, like in Fini's reference to Italy's 'dedication to pursue the objective of spreading peace and justice in every corner of the world' (Fini, 2004: 4) or D'Alema's all-encompassing vision of a combined (military, political, humanitarian, and economic) strategy for supporting failing states (D'Alema, 2006).

When Holsti was conducting his research in the late 1960s, the Europeans were at a very early stage of their integration process. The regional institutional framework is now much more complex and articulated. Not unexpectedly, Italy's NRC as *regional/subsystem collaborator* has been strengthened alongside the establishment, and then the deepening and widening of the European Union (including monetary union in 1999). Italy's participation and contribution to the European integration project is indeed always present as an underlining 'given' of the country's foreign policy, even though with the Berlusconi's governments a more 'eurorealist approach' starts showing (Quaglia, 2007).

Ministers focus on two issues in particular. The first is the need to revitalize and redesign the European Union (D'Alema, 2006, 2007), making it more lively and dynamic (Fini, 2004), allowing it to acquire a 'critical mass' (Frattini, 2008: 6), with a strong euro at its heart (Terzi, 2011) and moving beyond austerity and tackling new policies like migration (Bonino, 2013) or defence (Mogherini, 2014). The second issue is enlargement. Italian Foreign Affairs Ministers apparently do not see a tension between 'widening' and 'deepening' the European Union, as the issue of EU enlargement is always viewed under a positive light and clearly supported, by leaving the door open to the membership of Balkan countries and Turkey (Fini, 2004; D'Alema, 2007; Frattini, 2008; Bonino, 2013).

From the Ministers' speeches, we can infer that Italy still considers development cooperation a major policy objective (for Frattini, 2003 is even a 'pillar'). *Developer* is a significant role for Italy to play (it ranks fourth in Table 2 as per number of normative ideas supporting it): development cooperation is seen as a tool to meet the challenges brought about by a system in flux, with poor and failing countries being sources of instability. Development cooperation involves solidarity among countries

(Ruggiero, 2001) and fighting against poverty (Ruggiero, 2001; D'Alema, 2007). Sometimes it is included explicitly within the framework of foreign economic policy (D'Alema, 2006), linked directly to the empowerment of the African Union and other regional organizations (Frattini, 2008), or viewed in the context of 'civilian commitment' alongside the military presence of the international community in failed or weak states like Afghanistan (D'Alema, 2007; Terzi, 2011; Mogherini, 2014).

Development cooperation is justified in ethical terms, since 'it is and must continue to be a great opportunity, as well as a moral duty of our foreign policy' (Terzi, 2011: 8), but also in terms of economic return and prestige. On development cooperation 'security and prosperity of our own reality, of our companies and of our operators' depend, based on 'their capacity to keep on being seen as responsible protagonists of global governance, of which development is an essential part' (Terzi, 2011: 8). Of course, development aid needs financial resources, and budget cuts due to EU-imposed austerity plans have negatively impacted on this policy – at one point we learn (Bonino, 2013: 23) that resources were cut from one billion euros to 220–230 millions, equal to 0.15% of GDP, very far from the long-established G8 target of 0.7% for industrialized countries. All Ministers, being concerned about resource limitation, call for an increase in spending combined with a much needed revision of regulations to increase efficiency of development cooperation by modernizing its instruments since 'today we do not talk anymore about the cooperation of the 1980s: the world is slightly different and I have the impression that we must also update the instruments at our disposal' (Bonino, 2011: 23). Relevant law no. 49, dating from 1987, was actually modified only in 2015.

Finally, a few words have to be spent on *faithful ally*, the NRC that Holsti found as the most defining role of Italy's presence in the international arena in the late 1960s. With the end of the Cold war, in all evidence, this NRC has become residual in the Italian foreign policy discourse, with just four quotations, making it the second-to-last NRC after *cultural power*, which is somehow linked to economic diplomacy anyway. Moreover, the ally is no longer faithful as it used to be. Even though the alliance with the United States is constantly reaffirmed, on one hand, loyalty does not mean supporting all American policies or abstaining from criticizing what are perceived as Washington's mistakes, on the other, the alliance is rather seen as a mutually reinforcing complement of the European integration dimension. A few normative ideas put forward by Foreign Affairs Ministers clarify this point, explaining why we put 'faithful' into parentheses when we adopt this NRC for present Italy:

The government's foreign policy aims at fostering the growth of an autonomous European actor, but bound to the United States through solid and mature alliance relationships (D'Alema, 2006: 6).

It is time for Europe to become, at last, a security provider, and no longer remain a mere security consumer at the expenses of the United States. [...] I would not talk about less America, but about more Europe in our bilateral relationships. More



Europe, certainly, so that it can be a stronger ally, serving the United States at least inasmuch as the alliance with the Americans serves us (Frattoni, 2008: 8).

Transatlantic values [...] represent a clear dimension of our foreign policy. A stronger Europe, also with respect to its defense institutional framework, must be seen as a bolstering evolution of the Atlantic alliance (Terzi, 2011: 3).

As mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph, *faithful ally* was the most passive role among Italy's NRCs in the late 1960s. As the interpretation of this role changes, and 'faithfulness' somehow disappears, we might expect, *ceteris paribus*, to see a higher degree of activism in Italian foreign policy with respect to the past.

Indeed, considering the new role conceptions that we have singled out for Italy, all portray either a very active role (*effective multilateralism promoter/responsible state, globalization surfer/economic networker, cultural power*) or a moderately active role (*bridge, principled actor*). Tentatively, we could then argue that the combined effect of the weakening of a passive NRC, the ongoing validity of three quite active NRCs, and the development of five new active NRCs possibly make Italy move up from the upper passive group (III) to group II, in Holsti's (1970) classification, which includes, as far as policy design is concerned, 'lower active' countries.<sup>13</sup>

### On consistency: worldviews, foreign policy goals, and operational tools

In order to assess the consistency of Italy's foreign policy design intended as a fundamental ingredient of effectiveness, one last test must be conducted on the nexuses connecting scientific, normative, and operational ideas. As a first step we shall consider the link between world views and NRCs (Table 3). When the sign '+' appears, it means that the NRC is supported/reinforced by a corresponding scientific idea: for instance, the need to play the role of *globalization surfer/economic networker* is justified and strengthened by the three scientific ideas of complexity and dynamism of the international system, globalization creates opportunity and power shift to emerging markets, hence the number 3+ in the last column of line no. 7. The role of promoter of effective multilateralism is instead supported by change, power shift, EU as global actor, multilateralism as the cornerstone of world order, and state responsibility, while acting as a *bridge* is required by change and the new symmetry in the EU-US alliance.

The sign '-' in its turn means that the NRC is inversely related to the relevant scientific ideas capturing how the world works. As change, power shift and global EU transform the nature and sources of both challenges and opportunities, Italy remains a US ally while at the same time looking also elsewhere for partnerships

<sup>13</sup> As a side remark, in the Ministers' speeches some normative ideas are formulated as self-representations: Mogherini (2014: 5) talks about Italy as a regional power connected with the global system; Frattoni (2008: 4, 14) reminds us that Italy's geography makes the country a natural bridge and that Italy is a cultural superpower; and Terzi (2011: 2) declares that Italy is a global and regional power.



(e.g. more to the EU) and being frankly critical of perceived US mistakes. In other words, the ally is less faithful, hence the minus sign in the table.

In the overall, the high number (22+ and 3-) of links connecting NRCs and scientific ideas points to a remarkable coherence between world views and foreign policy goals. A first preliminary result, then, tells us that foreign policy seems to be rooted in a consistent reading of the international environment. Of course, we can expect that new NRCs will through time generate new world views as well as normative ideas/foreign policy goals – for instance, the NRC of *globalization surfer/ economic networker* gave birth in 2003 to foreign economic policy intended as a tool to make the country more effective in a complex economic world.

As a final step we shall observe whether normative ideas, regrouped for this purpose around general foreign policy goals, are grounded in scientific ideas or linked to operational ideas, or whether, being weakly linked or totally detached from them, are mere narrative for the domestic political audience and the public opinion in general. Let us examine each foreign policy goal in turn.

1. *To work so as to strengthen effective multilateralism, making it more inclusive, and making states more responsible.* This objective is grounded in scientific ideas no. 6 ('multilateralism is the cornerstone of world order') and no. 7 ('effective multilateralism entails state responsibility'), and corresponds to NRC no. 6 (the *effective multilateralist/responsible state*). In speeches, it has always an operative declination, by referring to specific institutions (EU, NATO, UN), or venues (e.g. peace conferences, and fora), and less frequently to policies.
2. *To face new security threats through the promotion of human rights and democracy.* It is based on scientific ideas no. 8 ('democracy fosters security and development') (Fini, 2004; D'Alema, 2006, 2007; Mogherini, 2014) and no. 1 ('the international system is complex and dynamic'). It also serves as a building block of NRC no. 1 (*mediator/integrator*), no. 3 (*developer*), and no. 9 (*principled actor*). However, it is very much related to a single contingent case (Afghanistan) expressing the need to move beyond a purely military intervention framework, thereby making the efforts of the international community within that country more effective and comprehensive. It is generally linked to operational ideas, but some ministers (Frattini, 2003, 2008; Terzi, 2011) do not link it to any 'means to an end': their statements about human rights and democracy are very prescriptive and they stand alone as mere fluctuating narratives, without any concrete policy suggestions. Other ministers like Fini (2004) and D'Alema (2006, 2007) present both dimensions (operational and principled).
3. *To facilitate the overcoming of divisions.* This objective – often expressed with references to fault lines in the Middle East, or in the Mediterranean, or dividing the West and Russia – is grounded in scientific idea no. 1 ('the international system is complex and dynamic') and it is a strong component of NRC no. 1 (*mediator/integrator*), while representing the backbone of NRC no. 5 (*bridge*). When it is stated it has always a specific operational side.
4. *To contribute to the enhancement of Europe.* In this case, the line of action is clearly linked to scientific idea no. 4 ('the EU can make the difference in world politics') and

(albeit more vaguely) no. 7 ('effective multilateralism entails state responsibility'). The related NRC is no. 2 *regional/subsystem collaborator*. As mentioned, for Italian Foreign Affairs Ministers the EU 'deepening' – that is, increasing the internal cohesiveness of Europe through sharing more policies, beyond the austerity-infused prescriptions – is not conceived as an alternative to the EU 'widening'. Needless to say, such objective is operationally linked to EU and EU-related policies.

5. *To revitalize the transatlantic relationship*. This foreign policy goal is grounded in scientific idea no. 5 ('the transatlantic partnership is a pillar of global governance') and directly generates NRC no. 4 (*ally*). It is anchored in NATO activities as operational ideas. Three comments are in order here. First, the scientific idea which supports the *ally* role appears only three times in the speeches: its recurrence is thus modest (Fini and D'Alema, 2007). Second, its appearance is concentrated in the years 2004–07, clearly as a consequence of the damage brought to the transatlantic alliance by American unilateralism in Iraq. Third, while such NRC disappears from the scene, since 2008 Foreign Affairs Ministers and Prime Ministers (Letta, 2013; Renzi, 2014) alike have made clear references to the 'power shift' idea, suggesting that the transatlantic alliance is indeed becoming slightly less relevant in a rapidly changing world. These comments explain why we have argued that the ally appears not to be so 'faithful' any longer.
6. *To internationalize the 'sistema Italia' (Italy as a system) and to consolidate relationships with new emerging countries, also through the promotion of culture*. The foreign policy goal here is grounded in scientific ideas no. 2 ('globalization creates opportunities') and no. 3 ('a power shift is occurring'). As a normative idea it represents the main building bloc of NRC no. 7 (*globalization surfer/economic networker*), while at the same time contributing to NRC no. 6 (*the effective multilateralist/responsible state*) and no. 8 (*cultural power*). Regarding the scientific ideas linked to this objective, we can observe that they are very broad and expressed in highly general terms. On operational ideas as means to the end of internationalizing Italy, three comments emerge from the analysis. First, they are very detailed but rather focused on domestic politics, making references to institutional and bureaucratic tools, both in the internal ('cabine di regia', committees, and cooperation activities with the Ministry for Economic Development and with the regions) and external (embassies, cultural institutes attached to the embassies, and foreign trade institutes abroad) dimensions. Second, there is no reference whatsoever to economic or financial multilateral organizations (e.g. G8,<sup>14</sup> G20, IMF, World Bank, or WTO): multilateralism is always referred to as *political* or *security* multilateralism, since traditionally foreign economic policy *vis-à-vis* international financial institutions falls under the portfolio of the Ministry of Economy. This takes us to the third comment. Italy as a *globalization surfer* is set to exploit opportunities bred by globalization, but it does not even *consider* to invest resources in global economic governance. Its participation in the different economic institutions appears more a

<sup>14</sup> With the notable exception of Ruggiero, whose speech was delivered before the G8 summit in Genoa in 2001. Ruggiero was also a former WTO Secretary General.

matter of status than the result of a real interest in its workings. The operational emphasis may then well mask a sense of impotence toward the waves of globalization while activism looks rather like a survival strategy, an attempt not to drown.

7. *To set priorities.* This foreign policy goal is grounded in scientific idea no. 9 ('setting priorities is crucial for middle powers'), and it often involves operational ideas, although sometimes the latter are very general. In a few cases – 'to contribute to the overcoming of divisions', 'to increase development aid resources' – priorities are indeed framed more as an attitude, or a petition of principle, than clearly focused actions. Priorities are indeed determined by geography, or by emergencies (the Middle East, the Mediterranean, Russia and Ukraine, Libya and Afghanistan), but no hierarchy among issues could be detected, with the two exceptions of the European dimension and the internationalization of Italian companies. In fact, this is not surprising and it does not undermine our general point, since the former clearly blurs the line between foreign policy and domestic politics, while the latter is a direct consequence of the economic crisis including the general belief of the elite (albeit never expressed in speeches) that, in the future, domestic demand will not be strong enough to sustain Italy's (hopeful) economic recovery.

Overall, we can conclude that normative ideas as NRCs are for the most part firmly grounded in world views. Normative ideas as foreign policy goals too appear significantly grounded in scientific ideas on how the world works and related to operational ideas so that Italian foreign policy can be considered adequately consistent as far as its design is concerned.

## Conclusion

Our aim when analyzing Italy's foreign policy design since 2001 – as outlined in Foreign Affairs Ministers' and Prime Ministers' speeches – was threefold. First, to evaluate if Italy's foreign policy ideas and NRCs have been updated to keep the pace with a dynamic and challenging world. Second, applying Goldstein and Keohane (1993) tripartition to foreign policy ideas, to establish if (normative ideas as) foreign policy goals represent mere narratives or are either grounded in scientific ideas or presented in connection with operational tools that would make Italy's foreign policy effective thanks to its consistency. Third, going back to Ravenhill's (1998) lesson, to assess if Italy as a middle power has designed its recent foreign policy in a way conducive to effectiveness in terms of the five 'Cs' Ravenhill himself points out: capacity, concentration, creativity, coalition-building, and credibility.

As far as the first objective is concerned, the conclusion is that the general reading of the international environment by Foreign Affairs Ministers does incorporate change. Among the nine scientific ideas on 'how the world works' extrapolated from the speeches, the first three ('the international system is complex and dynamic', 'globalization creates opportunities', and 'a power shift is occurring') signal a perception of the change occurring within the system, a change posing new challenges

and generating new opportunities at the same time. Ideas 4, 5, and 6 in Table 1 ('the EU can make a difference in world politics', 'the transatlantic partnership is a pillar of global governance', and 'multilateralism is the cornerstone of world order') – at a superficial reading – apparently reaffirm three pillars of Italy's post-WW II foreign policy. However, at a deeper level of analysis they show how a re-reading of these commitments has indeed taken place. Europe is perceived in its importance on the global stage (and not only as an anchor for Italy's stability and modernization), the transatlantic alliance does not prevent Italy from assuming a more autonomous role with respect to the United States, and multilateralism is not a mere principle, but rather an instrument for a more effective governance of the international system. Idea no. 7, in fact ('effective multilateralism entails state responsibility') confirms that also the perception of the centrality of multilateralism has changed. The idea that setting priorities is crucial for middle powers should point to the need to be focused, because scarcity of resources does not allow to simultaneously cope with a wide array of different challenges and seize opportunities.

Moving to the second objective, we found that, in general, normative ideas give birth to operational ideas as 'means to end', even though sometimes they are vague – such as references to 'dialogue', they require (lacking) resources (like in development aid) or are too practical and detailed to address the shortcomings of internal institutional dynamics (like in the case of the internationalization of the Italian system). The only objective which often is neither grounded in any scientific idea or directly linked to any operational idea – thus representing a mere narrative for the domestic audience – is human rights promotion. This finding is substantially consistent with the results of the study focused on Italy's conduct in the framework of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the UN Human Rights Council (Cofelice, 2017). Cofelice highlights a gap between Italy's remarkable activism in Geneva and its rather passive attitude in implementing the recommendations domestically, suggesting that the country's activism while involved in UPR may in fact be largely instrumental to gaining international reputation. Italy, as the analysis of Foreign Ministers' discourses equally purports, is not implementing a full-fledged human rights protection foreign policy (which would entail a much stronger domestic grounding). Its conduct within the UN Human Rights Council may thus be explained to a substantial extent by linking it to the *effective multilateralist/responsible state* NRC: after all Italy still considers multilateralism crucial as a 'shortcut to transcending the limits of power and influence' (Romero, 2016: 8).

Lastly, we come to the final task of looking at Italy's foreign policy through the lenses of Ravenhill's five 'Cs'. For the purpose of this paper, we assume for Italy the (limited) 'capacity' (the first 'C') of a middle power. As for 'concentration', the focus of Italy's foreign policy seems to be located at regional or sub-regional level, much related to space and time contingencies, as if foreign policy were to respond to 'natural' challenges – or indeed emergencies – mainly coming from the region Italy belongs to. On one hand Italy's Foreign Affairs Ministers seem to be aware that Italy must concentrate on some issues, but on the other hand the normative ideas

they expressed led to nine NRCs compared to the four that Holsti detected, with respect to Italy, in 1970. They are clearly far too many for a middle power. A self-evident contradiction emerges between the 'need to focus' and the diversity of roles that Italy wants to play: foreign policy does not seem to be consequential, in this respect.

Ravenhill's third 'C', 'credibility', is also problematic. If a country has few (economic and organizational) resources while at the same time nurturing the achievement of many goals, its action will be less credible. Given limited resources, not being adequately concentrated may lead to low effectiveness, as the 'coalition-building' (Ravenhill's fourth 'C') potential is not fulfilled. The contradiction between the number and diversity of foreign policy objectives Italy sets for itself and the limited resources at its disposal is considered a peculiar 'vice' of Italian foreign policy rooted in the 'presenzialismo' (the imperative of being present). Croci (1994), however, convincingly suggests that such expansive agenda may also depend on middle powers aspiration to play a greater role in the post-bipolar era.

As for the last 'C', the post-2001 Italian foreign policy design shows no sign of creativity, either substantial or discursive. Where there are signs of creativity they are aimed at the domestic political audience, either to advocate more financial resources (development aid) or the restructuring of the institutional architecture of central administration and public bodies (foreign economic policy). There is one exception: in Mogherini's speech, there are two clear references to some 'niche diplomacy' (for instance, in non-proliferation and the landmine ban issue), and to Italy as an actor involved in regional scenarios but with an eye on the wider implications of its action role on the global stage. However, again, these two points are not developed with sufficient originality, as they tend to remain at the discourse level, counting just a little more than mere narratives.

Concluding, the empirical findings of our research show that Italy seems not to be in the best condition to exploit – as a middle power (full-fledged or aspiring) – the advantages of Ravenhill's five 'Cs', while having reasonably updated – but without any meaningful and real focus – its own national NRCs and foreign policy ideas. More needs to be done, as 'the more these national role conceptions become part of the political culture of a nation, the more likely they set limits on perceived, or politically feasible, policy alternatives, and the less likely that idiosyncratic variables would be crucial in decision-making' (Holsti, 1970: 298), leading to a foreign policy of the country, not of the different governments, reasonably focused and consistent.

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## Supplementary material

To view supplementary material for this article, please visit <https://doi.org/10.1017/ipo.2017.5>

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