

BOOK REVIEW

Carla Monteleone, *Italy in Uncertain Times. Europeanizing Foreign Policy in the Declining Process of the American Hegemony*

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Italian foreign policy has been traditionally analysed by taking three political sets into consideration: The Atlantic community, based on the relationship with the United States; the European Union, to which Italy contributed since the very beginning as a founding member of the European Community; and the international organization that aims at managing international affairs on the basis of multilateral principles and practices, namely the United Nations, to which Italy was admitted in 1955.

As Carla Monteleone underlines, these three sets mutually reinforced during the Cold War to strengthen the US-centred international order and granted key assets to Italian foreign policy. The inclusion in each of them was very important for a status seeking middle power like Italy that needed international legitimation after WWII; that experienced severe domestic constraints on foreign policy; and whose external influence depended more on political alignments than on national capabilities. In fact, Italy played by the rules of these frameworks of cooperation during the Cold War, by granting her territory to American military bases, staunchly supporting the European integration project and international multilateral institutions. Overall, Italy played the role of coalition-builder, or facilitator, thereby contributing to the maintenance of the US-led ‘constitutional’ international order.

The volume *Italy in Uncertain Times* aims at understanding whether this role has recently changed in relation to developments featuring in both sides of the transatlantic relationship. On the American side, Monteleone notes the decline of the US leadership that started in the late ‘70s has materialized in the occasion of the global recession and, even more recently, the Trump administration seems to downplay the strategic relevance of European integration and multilateralism to the security of the United States. On the European side, the European project is facing a severe crisis that takes a multiplicity of forms on, such as the Brexit, the diffusion of Euroscepticism in the public opinion of member states and intra-European divisions on migration issues.

This multifaceted crisis is particularly puzzling in the case of Italy because the literature is offering diverging readings of the Europeanization of Italian foreign policy. Some scholars find clear evidences of the process of Europeanization; others maintain Italy is on a track of de-Europeanization; and some others suggest Italian foreign policy combines incremental Europeanization with the signs of renationalization. The lack of scholarly consensus on the process of Europeanization of Italian foreign policy calls for further research and is particularly disturbing because, according to Monteleone, the adaptation to the European framework of cooperation has been key to the role Italy played in the Atlantic and multilateral circles as well. Thanks to her coalitional behaviour, she maintains, Italy facilitated ‘the negotiated

convergence among EU member states' and this 'enabled the country to play a niche role that suits particularly well a middle power in a way that is consistent with its identity and strategic culture, and that increases Italy's structural opportunities and status' (p. 37).

Thanks to sound theoretical and methodological choices, *Italy in Uncertain Times* provides a valuable contribution to clarifying these issues. Firstly, Monteleone pays special attention to identify the process of Europeanization that, by its nature, is often difficult to be unambiguously grasped. According to her definition, Europeanization means 'adapting [... one's] foreign policy to be part of a coalition made of EU states, here called the European formalized coalition. [...] The European formalized coalition is here defined as a coalition of EU member states that has progressively strongly institutionalized foreign policy cooperation and formalized collective decision-making processes, whose members are guided by a negotiated convergence of interests and strategies and have developed norms to overcome internal disagreements and tends to present itself as a stable single unit over time to the point of creating expatiations on members' behaviour' (p. 2). Secondly, Monteleone originally focuses on the cohesion of EU members' behaviour at the UN. Namely, she studies the Europeanization of foreign policy by focusing on the arena where the whole sets of Italian foreign policy interact and the maintenance of the international order is a core organizational goal. Thirdly, Monteleone's research design is particularly promising because she is looking at the members' coalitional behaviour both at the General Assembly of the United Nations (UNGA) and at the Security Council (UNSC). While the former allows to study how states cluster across time and along political cleavages, the focus on the latter allows to detect the coalitional behaviour of states in relation to particularly relevant issues. Furthermore, the research is providing very rich information on states' coalitional behaviour because it analyses both voting and sponsoring behaviour, thereby allowing to put EU members' political preferences and projects under scrutiny.

Building on these bases, Carla Monteleone carries out a quantitative analysis of Italian voting and sponsoring behaviour in the UNGA and UNSC in order to detect whether the degree of Europeanization of Italian foreign policy varied in the period 2000–2017. More particularly, she asks whether the Italian coalitional behaviour at the UN reflected Italian belonging and support to the European formalized coalition, namely 'the majority of the EU member states' (p. 47). She also asks whether the Italian coalitional behaviour aimed at increasing the status of the country; whether the support to the United States became alternative to the European formalized coalition; and, eventually, whether Italian alignment with China, Russia, India and Brazil – the so-called rising powers – became more frequent and relevant. Furthermore, this quantitative research is enriched by a qualitative analysis of some of the most important issues in the period under consideration and for the maintenance of the international order such as human rights, disarmament and nuclear issues and the reform of the Security Council of the United Nations.

All in all, the research results are showing that Italian foreign policy is characterized by a substantial degree of Europeanization. Italy has tended to act together with the European formalized coalition across time, issues and UN bodies. This coalitional behaviour helped Italy to increase the effectiveness of her bargaining position and to improve her status, especially in key issues such as human trafficking and Libya. The research is also suggesting that Italian cohesion with the European formalized coalition has not interfered with the support to the US leadership; and that these pillars of Italian foreign policy have not been marginalized by the rising influence of the BRIC countries.

These results are improving our understanding of the factors and dynamics of Italian – and European – foreign policy and are even more convincing because the period researched by Monteleone has been affected by severe challenges to the stability of the three pillars of Italian external action: 9/11 that called into play the US leadership; the 2008 global recession that put at risk the sustainability of the open economic international order; the crisis of the EU that weakened – to say the least – the cohesion of the European community; and the troubled waters that UN has to sail in the current system.

Italy in Uncertain Times is showing that the Europeanization of Italian foreign policy has not been substantially affected by such a wide array of factors of crisis. On the contrary, it seems it has even improved, if one focuses on the most important issues that have been debated in the UNSC. However, Carla Monteleone notes 'a recent trend toward greater volatility in the choice of intra-EU coalition partners has indeed become apparent on less important issues [...] betraying a more utilitarian attachment to Europe' (p. 156), that could nurture a process of re-nationalization of Italian and European foreign policy.