

# **ETUDES HELLENIQUES**

# **HELLENIC STUDIES**

## **CRISE ET DE-EUROPÉANISATION CRISIS AND DE-EUROPEANIZATION**

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# **De-Europeanizing at the UN? The Impact of the International Economic Crisis on Italian Foreign Policy**

**Carla Monteleone\***

## **RÉSUMÉ**

Parmi les mécanismes identifiés dans la littérature sur l'eupéanisation de la politique étrangère italienne, l'idée d'appartenance à un groupe joue un rôle important. En secouant l'idée de la solidarité européenne, la crise économique internationale a favorisé un plus grand euroscepticisme en Italie, ce qui suggère que l'eupéanisation précédemment enregistrée de la politique étrangère italienne pourrait éventuellement également être affectée. L'article examine si et combien la politique étrangère italienne a été dé-eupéanisée en comparant le comportement italien à l'ONU d'avant et après la crise. Cette arène a l'avantage de permettre une analyse du comportement italien sur les questions les plus importantes de la politique étrangère. L'ONU est aussi l'une des institutions où les tentatives européennes à parler d'une seule voix ont entraîné les Etats membres à modifier leurs méthodes de travail, obtenant la réalisation des résultats remarquables. Après avoir examiné la littérature sur l'eupéanisation de la politique étrangère italienne, cette étude présente les données de l'Eurobaromètre sur la croissance de l'euroscepticisme en Italie. Elle s'interroge sur la question de savoir si la crise a eu un impact sur l'habitude italienne de s'aligner sur les autres Etats membres de l'UE à l'ONU, tant à l'Assemblée générale (2004-2013) qu' au Conseil de sécurité (2000-2012). En particulier, cette étude analyse le comportement de vote à l'Assemblée générale et le parrainage de comportement au Conseil de sécurité sur la base d'un ensemble de données, pertinemment construit et mesure les variations de distance de l'Italie par rapport à la majorité de l'UE à l'Assemblée générale aux pays qui ont été le plus impliqués dans la crise ou qui sont particulièrement importants pour la dynamique de l'UE à l'ONU ainsi qu'aux alternatives potentielles. Le document souligne que, bien que la crise économique a conduit à des variations temporaires et a créé un contexte favorable à agir de façon occasionnelle en cavalier seul, pour les Etats membres de l'UE, l'Italie incluse, une comparaison avec la période pré-crise montre une grande continuité dans l'eupéanisation de la politique étrangère italienne.

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## ABSTRACT

Among the mechanisms identified in the literature on the Europeanisation of Italian foreign policy, the idea of belonging to a group or “we-feeling” plays an important role. By shaking the idea of European solidarity, the international economic crisis has promoted greater euroscepticism in Italy, suggesting that the previously recorded Europeanisation of Italian foreign policy could eventually also be affected. The article explores whether and how much Italian foreign policy has been de-Europeanized by comparing Italian behavior at the UN before and after the crisis. This arena has the advantage of allowing an analysis of behavior on the most important foreign policy issues, but it is also one of the institutions in which greater European attempts at speaking with a single voice have driven member states to change their working methods, achieving remarkable results. After reviewing the literature on the Europeanisation of Italian foreign policy, the study presents Eurobarometer’s data on the growth of euroscepticism in Italy. It then assesses whether the crisis has had an impact on the Italian habit to coordinate with the other EU member states at the UN, both in the General Assembly (2004-2013) and in the Security Council (2000-2012). In particular, analysing voting behavior in the General Assembly and sponsoring behavior in the Security Council on the basis of a dataset appositely built, the paper measures variations in Italian distance from the EU majority in the General Assembly; the countries that were involved the most in the crisis or that are particularly important for EU dynamics at the UN; and, potential alternatives. The paper highlights that, although the economic crisis has led to temporary variations and has created a favorable context for occasional free-riding by EU member states, Italy included, a comparison with the pre-crisis period shows great continuity in the Europeanisation of Italian foreign policy.

## Introduction

The Italian case has been taken in literature as an example of both Europeanisation and de-Europeanisation. Among the mechanisms explaining the Europeanisation of Italian foreign policy, the idea of ‘belonging to a group’, the possibility of exploiting the European network for a projection beyond Italy’s capabilities (politics of scale) and the creation of a new opportunity structure, play an important role. However, the international economic crisis, and in particular the euro zone crisis, has shaken the idea of European solidarity at the very basis of the existence of a ‘group’ and has reduced resources to play an active role in foreign policy. This could potentially change the direction of Italian foreign policy.

This article intends to assess whether Italian foreign policy has – or not – de-Europeanised and whether this process can be related to the international economic crisis. In particular, the article will analyze the Italian voting behavior in the UN General Assembly (UNGA), because the wide range of issues on which that forum is called to express its position allows a systematic and comprehensive analysis of Italian foreign policy over a long period. This enables a comparison between pre- and post- crisis behavior. Moreover, considering the importance of multilateralism in Italian and European foreign policy, it allows us to analyze whether variations can be registered in one of the pillars of Italian foreign policy. Finally, the European attempts at speaking with a single voice in the UNGA have driven member states to change their working methods and have led to remarkable outcomes. It is therefore expected that changes in Europeanisation processes and outcomes should be reflected there.

After describing the Italian case by looking at the Europeanisation of Italian foreign policy and at which factors may have been affected by the economic crisis, this article will evaluate the extent to which Italy experienced a de-Europeanisation of its foreign policy as a result of the crisis looking at its voting behavior in the UNGA, and assess whether changes in the three dimensions of downloading, uploading and crossloading identified in the introduction of this special issue have occurred.

### **The Europeanisation of Italian Foreign Policy up to the Crisis**

The many ways in which Italian foreign policy has been deeply affected by the Europeanisation process have been carefully described by Paolo Rosa.<sup>1</sup> According to Rosa, the Europeanisation process has had consequences on elite socialization, on bureaucratic reorganization, on constitutional changes, on public opinion support for European foreign policy, and on the formulation of political guidelines. From Rosa's interviews, it emerges that officials from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs have made regular meetings with their European colleagues a standard procedure, and working together has become a habit that has

changed their own working rules. This socialisation process has had two important effects:

On the one hand, policy-makers get the hang of other countries foreign policy positions, so it has become a consolidated custom for Italian diplomats, when they first analyse an issue, to ask themselves what their European partners position is, and how far Italy can push with its requests without damaging EU cohesion. In addition, knowing its partners position influences the position that Italy finally adopts, as it helps in reducing deviant behavior. Furthermore, a common culture develops over time.

On the other hand, Italian diplomats learn to consider European cooperation as an instrument that helps strengthening their national foreign policy, because nobody really thinks that Italy's weight could be the same without the EU. Accordingly, the EU is an added value for Italian policy-makers. They consider it important to present themselves as 'Europe', even when what the EU does is not fully representative of Italian positions. The case of sanctions against the former Yugoslavia is particularly meaningful. Although Italy thought they were completely wrong, it accepted them in order to avoid damaging EU cohesion and the possibility for the EU to play a role in the crisis.<sup>2</sup>

Paolo Rosa also identified an important factor in the Europeanisation of Italian foreign policy in public opinion support for a European foreign and defense policy that rose from 37 per cent in 1987 to above 70 per cent in the 1990s. This means that Italian public opinion on this issue moved from being well below the EU average, to being well above the EU average. A similar pattern was registered in top decision makers' opinion polls.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, Paolo Rosa registered a change in the formulation of political guidelines as a result of the new opportunities created by multilateral structures, the "alibi function" provided by EU foreign policy cooperation to controversial actions, and the strengthening of Italy's image, reputation and weight abroad. This is interesting in that, despite showing a greater assertiveness in its foreign policy, Italy has tried to

put its interventions within a European framework, even when they concerned its own crucial national interests. Likewise, Italy has at times (for instance in relation to the issue of ‘rogue states’) chosen to slow down its actions and even change its national choices in order to meet the different positions of its EU partners, as its primary objective was not to break European solidarity.<sup>4</sup> As one of the officials interviewed by Paolo Rosa in 2001 highlights, “it is not only in pursuing the national interest that there is an effect, there is [an effect] in the very formulation of national interest [...]. The EU factor is already built-in during policy-making [...]. We are part more and more of this European framework and this determines the formulation of our policy, not just its implementation”.<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, the Europeanisation process has led to an “apparent priority shift in the last years from a preference for the U.S. ally, that in the past was the first to be consulted, to the EU partners, that nowadays are systematically and regularly consulted, even in case of difficult decisions”.<sup>6</sup>

### **Impact of the Crisis on Italy**

As pointed out by Donatella Della Porta and Manuela Caiani, however, the perceived increase in EU competences and powers has led to the politicisation of the debate on European institutions and to the growth both in interest in and contestation of choices made by EU institutions.<sup>7</sup> In particular, the common trend adopted by national governments to justify restrictive policies in the name of Europe has focalised attention on the consequences of European integration. This has introduced euro-skepticism in the Italian public debate and has highlighted the end of a permissive consensus toward the EU and the rise of critical attitudes towards the European integration process: the consensual approach based on weak preferences has started involving public opinion.<sup>8</sup> Although their research shows an increasing trend of Europeanisation that tends to grow in Italy more than in other countries, it also indicates a growing ‘Italianisation’ of the debate on Europe that leads to an increase in both politicisation and polarisation. The debate has been particularly strong on some issues, among which the euro, which has put into question the whole EU structure.

The debate on the euro was stronger after the Eurozone crisis and the response provided by the EU and its member states. The Eurozone crisis has been represented in the main Italian newspapers as the responsibility of the ‘grasshopper countries’, rather than the result of the systemic crisis in neo-liberal capitalism.<sup>9</sup> However, the German position, in particular, has come under attack both among the public and political leaders under the assumption that it showed lack of solidarity, betraying the very idea behind European integration. On the contrary, solidarity towards the other affected countries, Greece in particular, has been much diffused. In this context the new political formation Movimento 5 stelle (M5S), whose leader repeatedly called for an Italian exit from the euro and vehemently criticized the EU, was elected for the first time in the Italian Parliament in 2013, gaining 23.79% in the Italian Senate and 25.5% in the Italian Lower Chamber, and becoming the leading Italian party. A euro-skeptical attitude was the trademark of the M5S 2014 euro-campaign and, with 21.1% of the votes, the M5S was the second Italian party seating in the European Parliament. Criticism towards Germany and the EU were voiced with remarkably different styles and tones also by the other two main parties, PDL / Forza Italia and the Democratic Party (PD). Leaders of the PDL / Forza Italia opened to the possibility of abandoning the euro and depicted the fall of the Berlusconi government as the result of a ‘European plot’. Traditionally more critical towards European integration, PDL / Forza Italia highlighted its Euro-skepticism during the 2014 euro-campaign to regain lost votes. Leaders of the PD considered it crucial for Italy to regain credibility in order to renegotiate criteria related to public debt with the other European partners. It is remarkable that even in the case of the PD, despite keeping its pro-European stance and seeing Europe as a solution more than a problem, a very unusual critical tone towards Europe was adopted after the crisis and the goal of changing European austerity policies was clearly stated. Interestingly, though, as soon as the newly elected secretary of the PD became prime minister in 2014, he changed the framing of the current economic situation and advanced a more assertive posture. Accordingly, the 2014 electoral euro-campaign saw the main political party supportive of the EU, the PD,

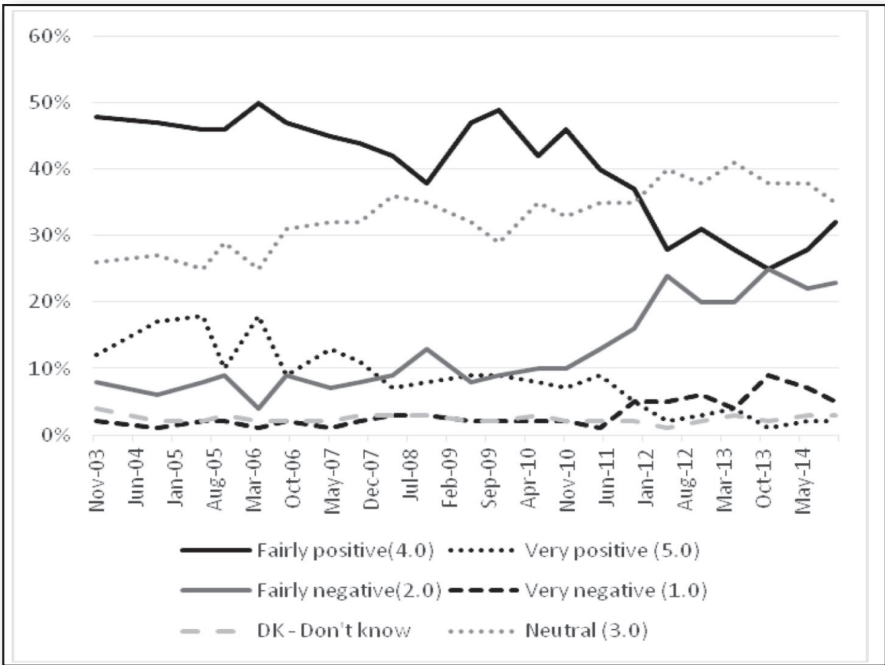
adopting a critical and more assertive stance and winning the elections with 40.8% of the votes.

Rather remarkable has been the increase in Euro-skepticism of right-wing formations, among which the Northern League has assumed over time a prominent position. As shown by Manuela Caiani and Nicol Conti, in constructing their social collective self-identity, right-wing formations often identify the EU and European institutions as their main enemy, and they see citizens in danger “due to the anti-democratic nature of the European elites and the EU institutions [...]”. The EU process as a whole is represented very negatively as the product of an anti-democratic global ideology aiming at the dismantling of the European system of social rights<sup>10</sup>. In particular, the Northern League criticizes the EU for its negative impact on employment security and social harmony, be it in terms of economic integration or of more permissive immigration policies (the latter issue has been strongly affected by the economic crisis).<sup>11</sup> Indeed, exit from the euro was the main political request advanced by the Northern League in the 2014 euro-campaign.

The debate on the euro and the EU has been reflected in Italian public opinion and registered by the Eurobarometer. As figure 1 shows, the percentage of positive answers dropped after the Eurozone crisis in 2010. Interestingly, though, the decline of the percentage of Italians who answered ‘very positive’ and ‘fairly positive’ started decreasing before the crisis and in the case of ‘fairly positive’ an increase could be registered in 2008 and then again in 2014. On the contrary, the percentage of Italians who had a ‘fairly negative’ or ‘very negative’ opinion of the EU had a marked increase. Interestingly, positive opinions often transformed into a ‘neutral’ one, and this position became prevalent after 2011. Nevertheless, this is a remarkable change for one of the traditionally most Europeanist countries.



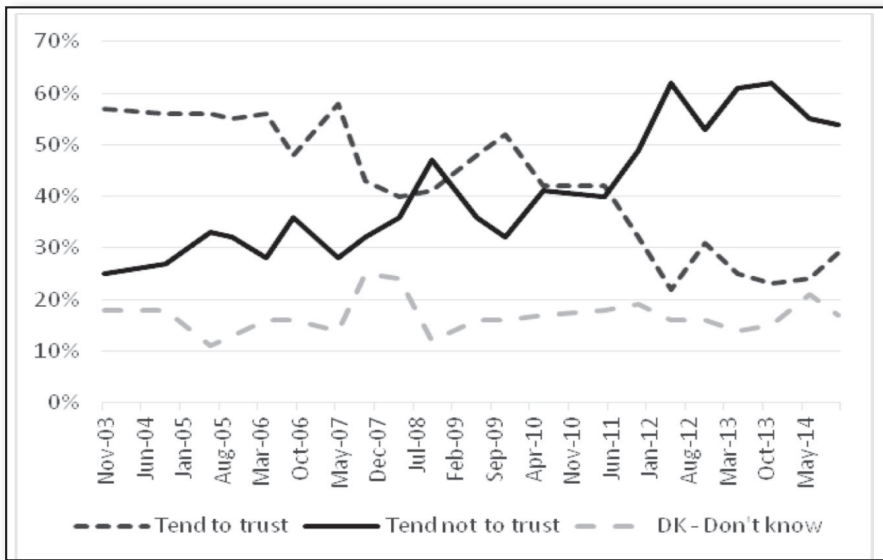
**Figure 1:** EU’s Image in Italy (Source: Eurobarometer)<sup>12</sup>



However, it was not only the EU’s image that was badly affected, but also the trust of the Italians in the EU (figure 2). Here the potential impact of the crisis is particularly evident, with a marked drop of ‘tend to trust’ answers after both 2007 and 2010 and the halving of people who tend to trust the EU in ten years (2003-2013). On the contrary, the percentage of Italians who ‘tend not to trust’ the EU has more than doubled in the same period and since 2011 has become the majority. Interestingly, though, the May 2013 *Standard EB 79* released by the Eurobarometer believes in the EU (25%, that is 3% more than the EU average) as a solution to the effects of the financial and economic crisis, more than in the national government (18%, that is 3% less that the EU average), in the IMF (14%), in the US (13%), or in the G20 (7%, that is almost half the EU average). Moreover, in 2014, the majority of Italian public opinion still did not trust the EU, but the trend of

those who tended not to trust the EU started declining, while the trend of those who trusted the EU started increasing again.

**Figure 2: Italians' Trust in the EU (Source: Eurobarometer)<sup>13</sup>**



These results may have an impact on the Europeanisation of Italian foreign policy: the questioning of the basic norms and values of the EU and the growing impression that Italian interests may differ from European ones might lead towards stances that are more independent and towards a reduction in the willingness of Italian governments to work towards common European positions. This may ultimately give way to de-Europeanisation.

### **Italian Foreign Policy de-Europeanizing as a Result of the Crisis?**

Analyzing Italian foreign policy in 2011, Elisabetta Brighi noted that “[s]ince 1991, the traditional and absolute (and most of the time passive) reliance on the EC/EU, combined with the accustomed ability

to use European institutions as both a *shelter* and an *instrument* of foreign policy, has paradoxically produced even stronger incentives to free ride, and an increasingly opportunistic and instrumental attitude vis-à-vis the EU.”<sup>14</sup> Brighi finds that the alternation of center-right and center-led coalitions has led to fluctuations towards Europe, in terms of style, discourse, and choices. This means that, although all Italian governments have kept their commitment to the two traditional pillars of Italian foreign policy, the US and the EU, they have also exercised more freedom of manoeuvre.

According to Elisabetta Brighi, Italy’s ‘mode of Europeanisation’ is “rather opportunistic and instrumental, despite the country’s abstract commitment to federalism. Italian foreign policy seems to be most Europeanised when most convenient for the country. Failing this condition, Italy cautiously, yet determinedly, turns to other options”.<sup>15</sup> This also means that, when the EU is divided, Italy strays from EU positions and at times even works to widen the cracks.<sup>16</sup> Despite acknowledging variations in the degree of Europeanisation in different foreign policy areas and issues, Brighi concludes that Italian foreign policy is resistant to substantial change in terms of its objectives and identity and that ultimately it has become a case of de-Europeanisation.

The case of relations with Russia is particularly interesting in order to understand whether downloading has been affected by the crisis. While Paolo Rosa noted that the importance of respecting human rights as a pillar of European foreign policy affected Italian relations with Russia to the point of becoming an obstacle in establishing closer relations,<sup>17</sup> Elisabetta Brighi notes that on Russia “centre-right governments have been more inclined to break the European unity on politically sensitive issues, such as human rights.”<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the special relationship of Italy with Russia has become evident on the occasion of the crisis in Ukraine and the appointment of High Representative Federica Mogherini. The soft position Italy adopted towards Russia weighted heavily against Mogherini’s appointment, and in all of the meetings Italy was very cautious on the expansion of sanctions against Russia, also because they hurt heavily the still weak Italian economy. Indeed, protests by Italian economic actors trading

with Russia gained space in Italian newspapers. Nevertheless, ultimately the Italian government preferred to align with its European partners to keep European unity, indicating that downloading is still present in one of the most sensitive areas of Italian foreign policy.

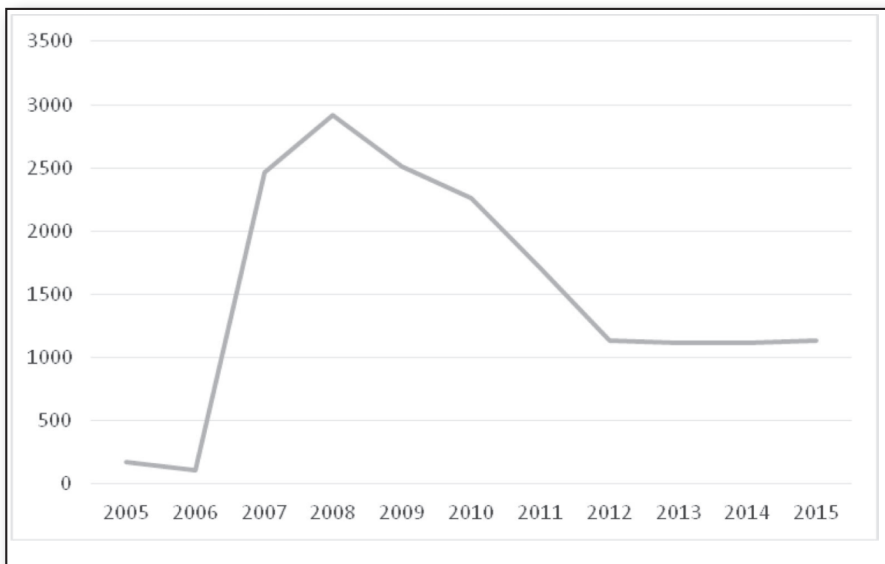
Another area in which downloading was evident is the Middle East, and in particular the granting to Palestine of observer status at the UN in 2012. Following the Monti's government strong political resolution to strengthen the European Union as an international actor, Italy actively worked to build a common European position. The effort was not successful. Nevertheless, thanks to strong pressures from Prime Minister Monti on Foreign Minister Terzi di Sant'agata, Italy shifted its position from abstention to a vote in favor of the resolution at the very last moment, explicitly declaring that it was doing that to join the majority of EU member states in order to have a less fragmented European position.<sup>19</sup>

An important area in which the impact of the crisis is evident and may be relevant in downloading and cross-loading processes, is defence. Opposition to any increase in military spending in times of crisis was symbolized by protests against investment on new F-35 aircrafts. This has led to a reduction in the number of aircrafts Italian governments had already committed to buy, but it has also led to a restructuring of Italian defense posture (embodied in the *Libro bianco per la sicurezza internazionale e la difesa*) aimed at reducing defense spending. Opposition to participation in peace operations in times of crisis also became more vocal and widespread in Italian public opinion and in some political parties.

According to the Italian Ministry of Defense,<sup>20</sup> Italian military personnel are currently involved in UN operations (in Cyprus, Mali, India/Pakistan, Lebanon, and Morocco), in NATO operations (in Bosnia, Afghanistan, Lithuania, Somalia, Macedonia, Kosovo, and in the Mediterranean), in EU operations (in Afghanistan, Kosovo, Mali, Somalia, Palestine/Egypt, Horn of Africa, Bosnia, Georgia, and in the Mediterranean), and it is present in eleven other kinds of operation (in Egypt, against ISIS, in Hebron, in Libya, in Malta, in the Antarctic, in the UAE, in Palestine, in Mozambique, in Somalia, and in Lebanon).

This is a very important commitment for Italy, one that has been renewed by the Renzi government who has supported the Italian contribution to operations in Mali and more recently in Libya. In the latter case, Italy even declared that it was willing to lead the operation. Nevertheless, the Italian contribution is more and more often symbolic, and, looking at figure 3, it is evident that the Italian commitment to UN peace operations was heavily affected by the economic crisis. The most important Italian commitment, the one to UNIFIL in Lebanon, for instance, saw a reduction from 2,849 personnel in 2008 to 1,683 in 2011, further reduced to 1,090 in 2013. Considering tensions in the area, it is possible to imagine that economic factors may have played a role in the decision to reduce the Italian presence. This inevitably affects the real capability that Italy has in providing substantial (not only symbolic) military support to EU peace operations that are not of vital interest for Italy.

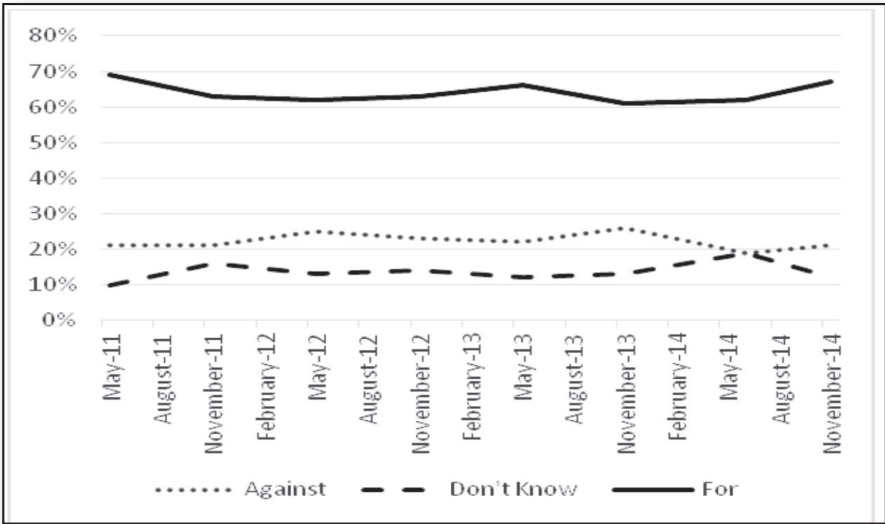
**Figure 3:** Italian personnel in UN peace operations.  
(Source: United Nations Peacekeeping)<sup>21</sup>



As for uploading, Italy has tried to upload a dispute with India onto the EU agenda. The case of two Italian marines involved in a shooting incident while on an anti-piracy operation in 2012 and arrested by India, sparked nationalistic protests against India in Italy and became an important issue for Italian governments. Incapable of making itself heard by India, Italy looked for support from its EU partners. Following a request from the Italian representative at the Political and Security Committee, in 2012, the then High Representative Ashton released a statement in favor of Italy.<sup>22</sup> This was followed by other positions of support towards Italian authorities and even by the threat that the issue could hurt EU-India relations. Nevertheless, despite formal support from the EU, Italy's negotiating position face to a rising power remains rather weak, so the issue is still not solved, and actually threatens to undermine the perception that EU support can really make the difference.

As for crossloading, changes in the perception of belonging to a European community due to the crisis have had an impact also on Italian public opinion's attitude towards foreign policy. Although available data only cover the 2011-2014 period, the Eurobarometer shows a very stable support at the European level toward a common foreign policy. In Italy (figure 4), public opinion support towards a common foreign policy is very high and represents a vast majority, but figures also demonstrate a more marked declining trend in the years in which Italy was most affected by the crisis. In addition, the percentage of Italians against a common foreign policy increased, reaching 25 per cent in May 2012 and 26% in November 2013, and then slightly declined. Signs of a trend change and new increase in support of a common foreign policy appeared in 2014, when, despite the fact that the crisis was still hitting hard, signs of economic recovery started being announced. Although the Eurobarometer results confirm that Italian public opinion still strongly supports a common foreign policy, they also suggest that the economic crisis may have led Italian public opinion to start questioning more than in the past EU foreign policy and the capability of the EU to defend its member states.

**Figure 4:** Italian public opinion support towards a common foreign policy 2011-2014 (Source: Eurobarometer)<sup>23</sup>



The economic crisis has been found to have an indirect effect on diffuse support for Europe, as it mostly affected trust and the perception of the benefits deriving from EU.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, data from the Eurobarometer highlights a negative influence of the international economic crisis on the opinion of Italians towards the EU and therefore touch upon a crucial aspect of its sense of belonging to a European community, with the EU now seen more as a problem than an opportunity. However, the crisis has a negative influence also on the resources available to Italy to promote its foreign policy under a very tight budget: while existing commitments have been maintained, Italian governments have made clear that no new missions are possible unless strictly related to core national interests.

In order to understand whether and how these changes following the international economic and financial crisis have had an impact on the Europeanisation of Italian foreign policy, it is useful to analyze Italian behavior at the UN, where the full range of foreign policy issues comes to be analysed and European countries have long acquired the

habit of working together. This allows a more systematic analysis of whether Italian foreign policy has de-Europeanised, by how much and on which issues.

### **Italian De-Europeanising at the UN?**

The UN General Assembly (UNGA) represents one of the most useful *fora* for analyzing in a systematic and comprehensive way continuities and changes in the Europeanisation of EU member states' foreign policies. Katie Laatikainen and Karen Smith have pointed out that three types of Europeanisation can be seen at play at the UN: the development of institutional capability for coordinating the policies of the EU member states; the adaptation of EU member states to ensure consistency and effectiveness to the EU voice; and an external diffusion process of European ideas and institutions.<sup>25</sup>

Acting as a single political group at the UNGA is a choice that creates a new institutional layer for EU states, one that is not formally recognized but that is perceived by the other UN member states.<sup>26</sup> Coordination at the UN, and especially the UNGA, means that “[d]ebate about the particular policy question or agenda item is continued until all members of the EU group without any exception agree to the direction and wording of the policy to be endorsed”.<sup>27</sup>

If Europeanisation has been recorded at the UN, there is still considerable variation in the degree of adaptation of EU member states towards a EU diplomacy<sup>28</sup> and remarkable differences have been registered on some issues,<sup>29</sup> reminding us that EU member states tend to defect when it comes to vital national issues. However, the increase in EU member states voting cohesion at the UNGA is generally considered as evidence of coordination results, as it has been repeatedly pointed out that starting from the 1990s coordination efforts at the UNGA drove to a marked increase in EU states voting cohesion. However, voting cohesion should not only to be associated with increasing similar interests among European states, but also as a result of the intense coordination work made in Brussels and by the missions of the member states in New York.<sup>30</sup> As shown by Johansson Nogués,



EU member states since the second half of the 1990s have managed to increase the level of unanimous votes to around 80% and to drastically reduce two-way splits and three-way splits.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, EU cohesion levels are generally higher than those for the full UNGA and differences in cohesion level are not necessarily registered on 'high politics' issues.<sup>32</sup>

The existing analyses on Italian voting behavior indicate a good record of Europeanisation of Italian foreign policy at the UN.<sup>33</sup> Going to the issues on which Italy could be seen as distant from the EU majority, Paul Luif highlighted that the distance Italy had from the EU majority in the UNGA during the 1990s and at the beginning of the 2000s on crucial issues such as the Middle East, security and disarmament, decolonization and human rights was minimal: Italy did belong to the existing EU majority regardless of the issue.<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, the 1990s even saw an improvement on the already excellent record of Italy as a European country, while the early 2000s saw a minimal (not necessarily meaningful) distance from the EU majority on the issue of human rights, which can be considered of particular importance for the Europeanisation of foreign policy.

Should the economic crisis have affected the Europeanized behavior of Italy at the UN, we would expect it to be reflected in: a) variations in Italian distance from the UNGA majority, because de-Europeanising corresponds to more freedom of maneuver and therefore to reduced efforts at coordinating positions; b) variations in closeness of the Italian vote to the countries that were involved the most in the crisis (such as Germany, on the one hand, the other Southern European countries, on the other) or that are traditionally particularly important for EU dynamics at the UN (such as the United Kingdom and France, because of their permanent seat in the Security Council), as a result of the repositioning. Should the economic crisis have affected the Europeanised behavior of Italy at the UN, it could also be expected that, moving closer to the other traditional pillar of Italian foreign policy, a move away from the EU could lead Italy closer to the USA than to EU states.

In order to see whether the international economic crisis has affected this record and how, an analysis of EU member states voting behavior

in the recorded votes (roll-call) in the UNGA has been conducted on the 59<sup>th</sup> to the 67<sup>th</sup> (partial)<sup>35</sup> sessions, i.e. for the period 2004-2013, a period long enough to verify whether the crisis has resulted in variations in Italian behavior.<sup>36</sup> Contrary to some existing literature on UNGA voting behavior, the choice was made to consider all recorded votes taken, not just those pertaining to a resolution, as these votes are at times extremely important to understand divisions within the EU.<sup>37</sup> As literature is divided on how to consider distance in relation to abstention and negative votes, here it has been preferred to focus on the existence of divisions, and therefore to regard 'yes', 'no', 'abstention' and 'absence' as four different positions, considering all of them as political decisions. This choice has been made also taking into account that no EU member state mission at the UN is so small that it cannot afford the presence of a national representative, and taking into account that at times EU member states were absent only for specific votes, but were present both before and after the missed votes.

Before proceeding to look at Italian voting behavior, a consideration of the general context is in order. EU cohesion in the period 2004-2013 had remarkable variations not previously registered, with drops in cohesion that are comparable to a pre-Single European Act situation. Interestingly, the drops in cohesion were registered in the 62<sup>nd</sup> UNGA session of 2007-2008 (41% of EU divided votes) and in the 65<sup>th</sup> UNGA session of 2010-2011 (38% of EU divided votes), that is immediately after the two phases of the crisis started to hit Europe. Partial data (from September 2012 to May 2013) regarding the 67<sup>th</sup> UNGA confirm deep divisions among EU member states and the trend line of EU divided votes is a positive one, pointing towards an increase of the votes on which the EU divides at the UNGA, and therefore towards reduced EU cohesion at the UNGA.

Italy's distance from the EU majority was calculated (table 1). In order to adapt to the enlargement rounds in the period under consideration, the EU majority was determined to be thirteen EU members for the 59<sup>th</sup> session, fourteen for the sessions from 60<sup>th</sup> to 66<sup>th</sup> and fifteen for the 67<sup>th</sup> session.<sup>38</sup> Although data are not immediately comparable, Italy seems to be slightly more distant from the EU majority than it was in the period

under consideration by Katie Laatikainen and Paul Luif. This is particularly evident in the 60<sup>th</sup>, 64<sup>th</sup> and 65<sup>th</sup> sessions. During the 60<sup>th</sup> session, pre-crisis, Italy was absent during six votes, five on environmental issues and one on UN operational activities.

**Table 1:** Italian Distance from EU Majority in the UNGA

UNGA session	59th 2004-05	60th 2005-06	61st 2006-07	62nd 2007-08	63rd 2008-09	64th 2009-10	65th 2010-11	66th 2011-12
I distance from EU majority	2	6	0	3	2	5	8	3
EU divided votes	31	30	32	41	26	28	38	25

More interesting for the purposes of this article, however, is the increased distance in the 64<sup>th</sup> and 65<sup>th</sup> sessions, after the crisis. Table 2 shows that during the 64<sup>th</sup> session, Italy assumed a minority position three times on human rights issues, and twice on the Gaza conflict. During the 65<sup>th</sup> session, Italy assumed a minority position once on a resolution on decolonization, five times it was absent in votes on armaments, but most importantly it was twice in a minority position in votes on nuclear issues, to the point of being not only the only EU member state, but also a very isolated UN member (only Bosnia and Pakistan voted with Italy) to vote against the inclusion of a paragraph calling for the immediate start of negotiations in the Committee on Disarmament on a fissile-material cut off treaty.

**Table 2:** Issues on which Italy Distanced from the EU Majority

59th 2004-05	60th 2005-06	61st 2006-07	62nd 2007-08	63rd 2008-09	64th 2009-10	65th 2010-11	66th 2011-12	67th 2012-2013 (partial)
Human rights (2)	Environment (5) UN operational issues (1)	None	Armaments (1) Nuclear (1) Outer space (1)	Armaments (1) Nuclear (1)	Human rights (3) Gaza (2)	Armaments (5) Nuclear (2) Decolonization (1)	Armaments (1) Nuclear (1) Human rights (1)	Armaments (1) Nuclear (1) Human rights (1)

In the period under consideration Italy voted unlike the EU majority fifteen times on disarmament and nuclear issues, seven times on human rights issues, five times on environmental issues, twice on the Middle East, once on decolonization issues and once on UN operational issues and on outer space. While the concentration of defections in relation to disarmament and nuclear issues indicates a constant distance from the EU majority in relation to an issue that is evidently perceived as pertaining to its vital interests and on which Italy wants to preserve its sovereignty, it is more interesting to note the distance on human rights, as this is an issue area that characterizes the EU as a normative power and is considered in the literature as an indicator of Europeanisation. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that this trend confirms what had already been observed by Paul Luif<sup>39</sup> regarding the minimal distance of Italy from the EU majority on the Middle East, security and disarmament, decolonization and human rights.

It is also important to note that, if the crisis has had an impact on the Italian willingness to be part of the EU majority in the 64<sup>th</sup> and 65<sup>th</sup> sessions, the following sessions indicate that distances have been much reduced. All in all, it is possible to see a temporary and limited impact of the crisis within a longer trend of a more critical and less passive Italian attitude toward the EU, more than irreversible signs of de-Europeanizing as a result of the crisis.

This impression seems to be confirmed by the continuity of Italian voting behavior in the UNGA in Italian closeness to or distance from other EU countries. It is worth highlighting that the distance here calculated concerns of all the EU divided votes and not just the ones on which Italy distanced itself from the EU majority. Calculating distance as the percentage of different voting behavior adopted in EU divided votes, it is remarkable the constant distance Italy has from the United Kingdom and France, who regularly figure on top of the list, before and after the crisis. Among other countries, Malta, Cyprus and Sweden also figure regularly on top positions and no meaningful variations could be registered after the crisis. On the contrary, it is also remarkable to find Germany regularly at the bottom of the list, signaling that the crisis did not make Italian foreign policy more

distant from a country whose position Italy mostly opposed in the economic and financial sector, and therefore that the disagreements in relation to the crisis and its management were not transferred in the foreign policy sector and on Italian Europeanisation.

However, considering that here all different positions are considered as equally distant, it is worth analyzing closeness too, that is which EU states voted exactly like Italy in EU divided votes. Interestingly, a variation in the countries on top of the list can be registered, but it is mostly in relation to small countries among the 'new' EU members. On the contrary, despite the crisis, Italian and German voting cohesion increased and became stable, to the point of putting Germany as the closest country to Italy since the 61<sup>st</sup> UNGA session. France and the United Kingdom are regularly the least close to Italy.

Figure 5 allows us to better understand variations in the Italian position in relation to the main actors of the crisis. Should the crisis transfer from the economic and financial sector to foreign policy, greater distance between Italy and Germany could be expected, but also a greater closeness between Italy and the other EU countries mostly affected by the crisis and in which a great resentment towards the EU and its measures took place; that is, Greece, Portugal, Spain and Ireland. In addition, considering that France distanced itself from Germany in the solutions proposed, a greater closeness to France could be expected. Finally the United Kingdom being the most distant country from the EU, a greater closeness between the two countries could signal a strategic alliance in the direction towards a loss of interest for the EU.

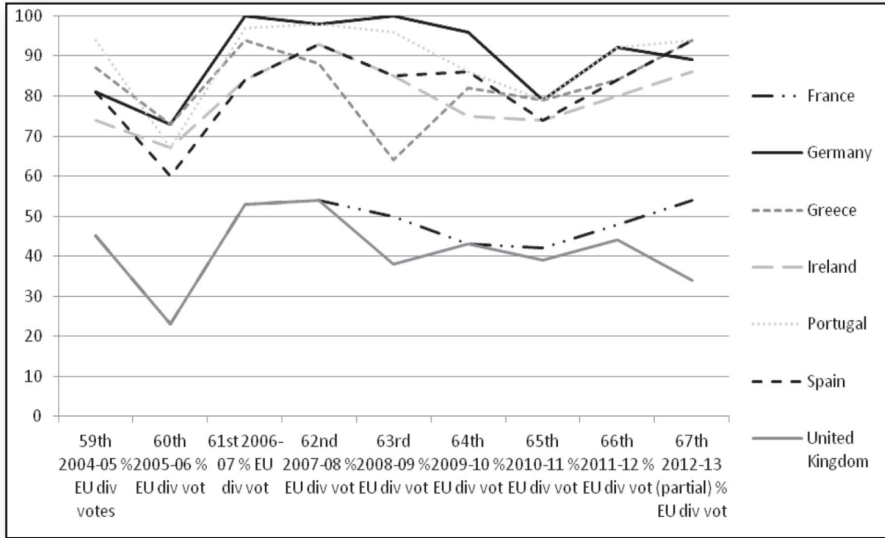
The closeness between Italy and Germany peaked before the crisis and was affected by it. Indeed, during the 65<sup>th</sup> session, the voting cohesion dropped by seventeen points compared to the previous session and by twenty one points compared to the 63<sup>rd</sup>, that is when the economic crisis hit the hardest. Moreover, the cohesion level never recovered to the top levels of the 61<sup>st</sup>, 62<sup>nd</sup> and 63<sup>rd</sup> sessions. However, not only cohesion levels dramatically improved during the 66<sup>th</sup> session, and the trend line in the considered period shows an increase in cohesion, but Germany remained the third EU closest country to Italy.

Should this trend be confirmed in the following years, this would result in a temporary impact of the crisis more than in a permanent change.

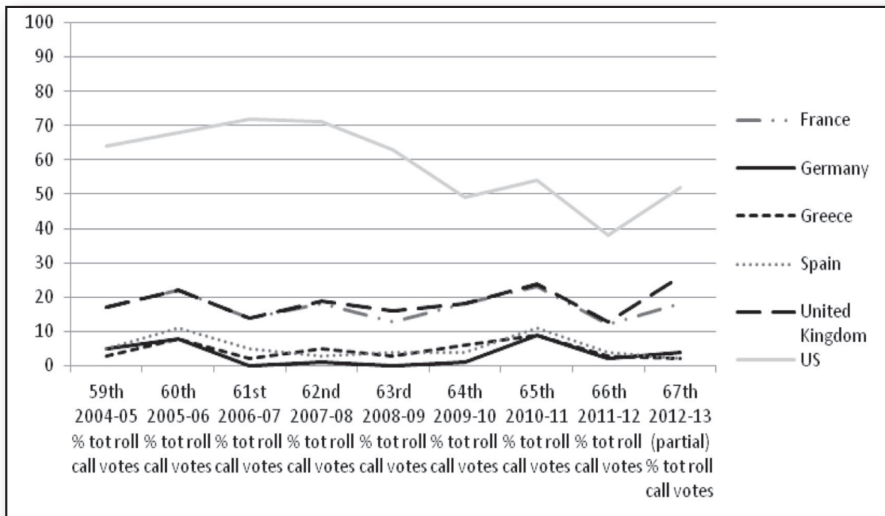
Interestingly, cohesion with France followed a similar trend, showing that, despite the different positions between France and Germany on how to deal with the economic crisis, Italy and France maintained and even worsened their distance after the crisis hit. However, as in the case of Germany, its closeness improved starting from the 66<sup>th</sup> session. Interestingly, also the closeness Italy had with the other affected countries worsened as a result of the crisis. Particularly interesting is the drop in Italian-Greek closeness during the 63<sup>rd</sup> session. However, the 66<sup>th</sup> session and the partial 67<sup>th</sup> session show a great improvement and closeness between the countries that were hit the hardest by the crisis. Interestingly, though, the trend line of relations with Greece is less steep than the one of relations with Germany. This indicates that the countries most affected by the crisis did not form in the UNGA a coalition that is alternative to Germany. As for the closeness between Italy and the UK, it only worsened after the crisis hit, showing that Italy has never looked to the UK as an alternative.

Relations with the US, on the contrary, critically improved after the crisis started and the two countries became much closer (figure 6). The distance between the two countries was reduced from 72% of different votes in the 61<sup>st</sup> session to 38% in the 66<sup>th</sup>. This might confirm that Italy started looking more at the US. However, a comparison with the distance from Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Spain and Greece shows that the US is still at a great distance in comparison with the other European countries: Germany, Spain and Greece remain much closer to Italy. Figure 6 also leads to think to the Obama Presidency and its attention toward multilateralism as a more plausible explanation for the variation.

**Figure 5:** Italian Closeness to the Main Actors of the Crisis in the UNGA (Source: Personal elaboration on UN data)



**Figure 6:** Italian distance from the US, Germany, France, Greece, Spain and the UK in the UNGA (Source: Personal elaboration on UN data)



To sum up, although Italian voting behavior in the UNGA after the crisis showed a slight reduction in processes that could be associated with downloading, as indicated by the increase in the number of dissenting votes Italy expressed in relation to the EU majority and by the issues on which it expressed it, disarmament and nuclear issues and even more on human rights, the change appears to be rather limited and has to be contextualised as taking place at a moment of increasing fragmentation in EU member states' voting behavior at the UN. Accordingly, Italian stances seem to be related to an EU temporary incapacity to reach a common position more than to domestic factors or to a reduced keenness to adopt common positions and adapt its foreign policy accordingly. On the contrary, Italy tends to appear firmly with the majority of EU member states, even when, as in the 64<sup>th</sup> and 65<sup>th</sup> sessions, the effect of the crisis became apparent and Italy voted alone or with the minority of EU member states more often than usual.

As for uploading, not only does the analysis confirm the Italian willingness to contribute to EU common stances, but it also suggests that no nationalistic factor related to the crisis has been in place. Contrary to expectations that Italy might have distanced itself from Germany and become closer to other countries deeply affected by the crisis, translating disagreements on economic policies and nationalistic stances into the field of foreign policy, the initial slight distance from the German position was compensated by the continuity in the position of Germany as one of the EU member states whose voting behavior was closest to the Italian one. And the reduced distance with other affected countries never became an alternative coalition nucleus. Finally, very often the Italian opposition to the EU majority took place on operative paragraphs, indicating the attempt to influence the final version of the resolution to be adopted rather than to stop the adoption of a resolution.

As for crossloading, it is not possible to say that conditions resulting from the economic crisis are introducing changes that undermine the European orientation of Italian foreign policy. Nevertheless, it is possible to say that the perception of an increased European



fragmentation has increased the freedom of maneuver that Italy perceives, therefore creating new incentives to act independently from the EU majority when Italian interests and values are at stake.

## Conclusions

This article intended to assess whether Italian foreign policy has – or not – de-Europeanized in the three dimensions of downloading, uploading and cross-loading, and whether this process can be related to the international economic crisis, both in terms of loss of the internal bonds and in terms of loss of capabilities to contribute due to a reduced availability of resources. In order to do that, an analysis of Italian voting behavior in the UNGA was conducted, to see whether meaningful variations could be registered because of the crisis. Particular attention was paid to variation in the distance of Italian voting behavior from the EU majority and from specific countries that were mostly involved in the economic crisis or represented potential alternatives. Variations were registered after the crisis. However, they seem to be limited and temporary, more the result of EU states difficulties in building and maintaining a level of governance than the result of a process of Italian foreign policy de-Europeanisation. The Italian greater freedom of maneuver seems to be more related to a rather temporary permissive context than to a greater willingness to free ride. However, partial data from the 67<sup>th</sup> UNGA session remain as a warning that tensions are still present and capable of inflicting more permanent damage not only on the Europeanisation of Italian foreign policy, but also on EU achievements in the realm of foreign policy in general, and at the UN in particular.

## NOTES

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  35. Please, note that because of data availability regarding the 67th UNGA session only the period until May 2013 was considered, so data regarding the 67<sup>th</sup> UNGA session are not comparable with data regarding previous periods and were included in the analysis only to provide an idea of the trend.
  36. Data were taken from the UN General Assembly website <http://www.un.org/en/ga/> in relation to resolutions and from the UN website UNBISNET [unbisnet.un.org](http://unbisnet.un.org), and the meeting records and/or press releases were analyzed for each session.
  37. In this sense, see also Luif, *EU Cohesion in the UN General Assembly*, *op. cit.*
  38. This means that votes on A/RES/59/75 (split 11-3-11-0), A/RES/61/125 (split 13-0-11-4), A/RES/67/36 (split 12-2-13-1) and A/RES/67/19 (split 14-1-13-0) could not be taken into consideration because no EU majority was formed.
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