

# **Containing Containment: Rethinking Italy's Experience during the Cold War**

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In this paper, I examine the impact of the Cold War on the Italian political system. My objective is to understand how post World War II international dynamics interacted with Italian domestic politics, eventually limiting Italy's sovereignty. An analysis of the Italian case, for all its peculiarities, represents in fact an excellent case study of the national/international nexus that characterized the political life of Washington and Moscow's European lesser allies during the Cold War.

As a former enemy, punished by a severe peace treaty, Italy was rapidly transformed into a fully contributing member of the Atlantic anti-Communist community. Anti-Communism became the crucial principle of legitimacy that defined inclusion and exclusion within the international alliance of which Italy was a member. As such, anti-Communism inevitably clashed with the anti-Fascist foundations of the Italian constitution, approved in 1948, that was explicitly based on the popular front experience of the resistance and post-war years and recognized the political legitimacy of the Communist Party (*Partito Comunista Italiano*, PCI). This conflictual duality between the formal constitution and the material one imposed by the international situation, the opportunistic pro-Western stance of the main Italian governing party, the Christian Democrats (*Democrazia Cristiana*, DC), and PCI's dependency on (and submission to) the Soviet Union were soon to become constitutive elements of the Italian republic. This exposed the country to radical tensions and threatened the very premises on which it rested. The history of post-war Italy soon became dominated by the intrinsic contradiction of being a member of the Atlantic community and at the same time accepting the inclusion in the national polity of a pro-Soviet Communist party, that theoretically could legally (through a normal electoral process) go over to the enemy camp.

This paper will examine American efforts to solve once and for all this contradiction, DC's attempts to preserve the benefits gained after Italy's admission to the Western *communitas*, while preventing the country from being thrown into the chaos of a new civil war, and PCI's ambiguous and ultimately self-defeating relationship with Moscow. For this reason, the essay is divided into three distinct parts:

1. An analysis of the relations between the United States and its main Italian interlocutor, the DC, in the period that goes from 1947 (fall of the last government of national unity, and consequent formation of a centrist executive) to 1955, when international dynamics (Western Germany's admission to NATO, creation of the Warsaw Pact, 'Spirit of Geneva')

and first détente) contributed to crystallize the bipolar status quo on the European continent.

2. An examination of the PCI's strategy and of how its dependency on the Soviet Union impaired the possibility for the party to represent a concrete and feasible alternative to the DC.
3. A final attempt to summarize the main elements that characterized the Cold War in Italy, and the way it was waged by its main actors (United States, Soviet Union, DC, and PCI).

### **1. The United States and the DC**

External and domestic factors determined the position of Italy in the new post-World War II international system. Italy became a natural member of the British-American sphere of influence as a consequence of both military operations and implicit geopolitical agreements between the allies. The successes of the pro-Western parties at the polls (in the elections of 1946 for the Constitutional Assembly, and in the first parliamentary elections of 1948) confirmed this outcome.

Nonetheless, DC's leaders were extremely reluctant to accept the evolution of international affairs and the division of Europe into two antagonistic blocs. Nationalist *topoi* still permeated the thinking of many Christian Democrats. In 1946, the young Giulio Andreotti, on his way to become the most important and powerful Italian politician of the post-war period, defined 'Imperialism' in the Social Dictionary as the "politics menacing small countries through the creation of powerful blocs of states", whose main examples were "the British, the Russian, and the North-American". A few months later, Christian Democrat premier, Alcide De Gasperi, expressed the auspice that Italy could act as a "bridge of conciliation" between the United States and the Soviet Union. DC's radical left-winger, Giuseppe Dossetti, did not miss any opportunity to attack the monopolistic capitalism of the American system, the "imperialism of American businessmen", and the "bellicism" of Washington's foreign policy<sup>1</sup>.

In the immediate post-war years, the DC flirted with the idea, supported also by some Vatican circles, to create a neutral Christian Europe (or, in a less ambitious form, a catholic bloc of

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<sup>1</sup> G. Formigoni, *La Democrazia Cristiana e l'alleanza occidentale*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1996, 100, 156; P. Pombeni, *Il gruppo dossettiano e la fondazione della democrazia italiana*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1979, 315-7; A. Giovagnoli, *Il partito italiano. La Democrazia Cristiana dal 1942 al 1994*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1996.

Latin European countries), impervious to the corrupting influence of the different, but equally unacceptable, forms of modern barbarism represented by the American and the Soviet models. For the conservative sectors of the DC, an autonomous, neutral, and Christian Europe had to be modeled on the experience of Franco's Spain. For the left wing of the party, instead, this autonomy represented the precondition for a drastic social and economic experiment, based on the egalitarian and progressive elements of the catholic social doctrine and on a dialogue with the Social-Democratic and neo-Keynesian experiences promoted in other parts of Europe. The common nationalist milieu of these different, if not antithetical, projects manifested itself also in the initial attempt (1946-47) of the De Gasperi governments to pursue a neo-mercantilist economic policy, intended to contain the country's exposure to international trade and to post-war financial interdependence<sup>2</sup>.

International and domestic difficulties obliged the Christian Democrats to attenuate their most extreme nationalist inclinations. In 1947, the irreconcilable political differences between the DC and the Left ended the Italian experience of popular frontism. The international financial crisis of 1946-47 showed the impracticability of neo-mercantilist panaceas. The radicalization of international tensions in Europe and the specter of a new conflict reminded Italy's governments of the extreme vulnerability of the country, whose military capabilities had been severely impaired by the clauses of the Peace Treaty ratified in January 1947. The necessity to find an external dispenser of economic and military security led the DC leadership (and Alcide De Gasperi first and foremost) to moderate its 'third-forcist' and nationalist tones. The years between 1947 (announcement of the Marshall Plan and creation of the OEEC) and 1949 (ratification of the Atlantic Pact) were thus characterized by the efforts of the Italian government to be included in the strategic and economic interdependence developed within the Western bloc. Borrowing historian Geir Lundestad's well-known (and largely abused) formula, we can say that the extension of the "American empire" to Italian territory was largely "invited" by Italy's ruling elites: a form of "consensual hegemony", which was legitimated by the electoral endorsement of Italian voters<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> F. Romero, *Gli Stati Uniti in Italia: il Piano Marshall e il Patto Atlantico*, in Francesco Barbagallo (ed.), *Storia dell'Italia Repubblicana. Vol.I: La Costruzione della Democrazia. Dalla caduta del Fascismo agli Anni Cinquanta*, Torino, Einaudi, 1994, 233-289; R.Gualtieri, *Piano Marshall, commercio estero e sviluppo in Italia: alle origini dell'europeismo centrista*, "Studi Storici", n.3, 1998, 853-897.

<sup>3</sup> G. Lundestad, *Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945-52*, "Journal of Peace Research", 23, 1986, 263-277. "Consensual hegemony" is instead the definition applied by Charles Maier to the relations between the United States and its Western European allies in the post-World War II years. See C. Maier, "Alliance

The DC rapidly abandoned its most high-sounding nationalist rhetoric. The progressive inclusion of Italy in what *New York Times* correspondent and editorialist, Anne McCormick, labeled as “New Atlantis” led both sides (the United States and the DC) to search an ideological convergence through the elaboration of a shared and often artificial Atlantic mythology<sup>4</sup>. In the context of this analysis, however, two strictly interrelated aspects need to be emphasized. First, DC’s nationalism did not entirely disappear. In many ways the phase of invitation ended once Italy was accepted into the Atlantic alliance, and in the following years the relationship between Italy and the United States became much more dialectical and conflictual. Second, even in these early years of the Cold War, American capacity to condition Italian affairs was very limited. As Marshall planners and U.S. diplomats were soon to discover, the stubborn resistance of Italian political and economic elites often frustrated ambitious American projects to radically reform the Italian political and economic system. The first years of the Cold War in Italy (1947-1950), which I define as the period of positive containment, were thus characterized by a very limited implementation of the American plans for Italy.

a) *Positive containment, 1947-1950*<sup>5</sup>

Using the formula later adopted by its conservative detractors, American interpretation of Italy’s problems during the first years of the Cold War can be defined as a form of economic determinism. The origins of the Italian political situation and the success of the Communist ideology were considered by many U.S. officials to be mainly economic in nature. The strength of the PCI was interpreted by Washington in a double and ambivalent way: as the inevitable product of Italy’s poverty and social backwardness, on the one hand, and as a

and autonomy: European identity and United States foreign policy objectives in the Truman years”, in M. J. Lacey (ed.), *The Truman Presidency*, New York/Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, 273-298.

<sup>4</sup> “With the Atlantic Pact a new region has come into being. A geographic expression and economic partnership has taken on overnight the shape of a political community. Already it is referred to as Atlantica. It is as if the lost continent of Atlantis had suddenly emerged from the sea that covered it and become solid ground again (...) once evoked, Atlantica is not likely to sink into the sea again. It is a nucleus which might grow into anything”, Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Cause and Effect of the Rise of the New Atlantis”, *New York Times*, March 23, 1949. Pier Paolo D’Attorre, *Sogno americano e mito sovietico nell’Italia contemporanea*, in Pier Paolo D’Attorre (ed.), *Nemici per la Pelle. Sogno Americano e Mito Sovietico nell’Italia Contemporanea*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 1991, 15-68.

<sup>5</sup> The term “containment” is used here as a convenient catchall formula to indicate American anti-Communist strategy. J.L. Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: a Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy*. New York/Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1982.

subversive and mainly political phenomenon directed by the Muscovite headquarters on the other. But in the late 1940s the first interpretation was clearly predominant: Italian Communism was understood as the degenerate product of legitimate economic and social grievances, which could be tackled only through an extensive program of reforms and economic growth<sup>6</sup>.

US officials believed that through the adoption of an a-conflictual model of industrial and economic relations, directly inspired by American experience, the presence of anti-systemic parties like the PCI would be reduced within the normal and physiologic limits proper to any civil and democratic country. The elements of the “politics of productivity” the United States tried to promote in Italy were similar to those applied in other theatres of the Cold War: increasing levels of agricultural and industrial productivity through the introduction of most innovative methods and technologies; the adoption of a land reform in the most backward regions of the country; the creation of a new middle class of landowners; the elimination of the most inefficient public and private monopolies; the reform of the antiquated and unequal fiscal system; and the creation of apolitical and corporative trade unions<sup>7</sup>.

These projects represented the clear and often naive expression of a ‘New-Deal’ mentality diffused among many officials of the agency in charge of administering the Marshall Plan, the Economic Cooperation Agency [ECA]. They were based on the assumption that the Italian government would use public investments and Marshall Plan funds to compensate for the paucity of private investments. However this assumption proved to be false. De Gasperi and his Minister of Budget, the conservative DC Giuseppe Pella, opted for an ambiguous economic policy where anti-inflationary monetary policies combined with the protection of several sectors of the Italian economy and the preservation of part of the corporatist structure inherited from the Fascist era. This strategy was harshly criticized by the first ECA’s report on

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<sup>6</sup> J. Miller, *The United States and Italy, 1940-1950. The Politics and Diplomacy of Stabilization*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1986; J. Harper, *America and the Reconstruction of Italy, 1945-1948*, Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986; Pier Paolo D’Atorre, “Il Piano Marshall: politica, economia, relazioni internazionali nella ricostruzione italiana”, in Ennio Di Nolfo, Romain H. Rainero e Brunello Vigizzi (eds.), *L’Italia e la politica di potenza in Europa (1945-1950)*, Milan, Marzorati, 1990, 498-545.

<sup>7</sup> C. Maier, *The politics of productivity: foundations of American international economic policy after World War II*, “International Organizations”, No.4, 1977, 607-633; F. Romero, *The United States and the European Trade Union Movement, 1944-1951*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1992; L. Segreto, *Gli investimenti americani in Italia (1945-1963)*, “Studi Storici”, 37, gennaio-marzo 1996, 273-316.

Italy (the 1949 *Country Study*), and, later, by the Marshall Plan administrator in Italy, Leon Dayton<sup>8</sup>.

The pedagogic and optimistic approach of the ECA's 'New Dealers' was often criticized by the geopolitical experts of the Department of State, who supported a more direct action against the PCI, and were more conscious of the limited means available to the United States to influence the domestic politics of its junior allies. However, in the phase of *positive containment* even the State Department European desk believed in the 'transformational power' of the Western *communitas*. This was evident during the discussion preceding the ratification of the Atlantic Pact, the second pillar of the US strategy of containment. The inclusion of Italy in the alliance was one of the most debated and controversial issues. Those who opposed its admission, including Truman and the senior members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, stressed the fact Italy was militarily weak, geographically (but, according to diplomat George Kennan, even culturally and politically) outside the Atlantic perimeter, politically unreliable and, considering the strength of the PCI, "too close to the Soviet orbit" (Kennan again). In other words, accepting Italy in the Atlantic community implied assuming the danger of introducing the 'communist virus' inside the 'healthy body' of the Western bloc<sup>9</sup>.

Those within the US government who supported Italy's admission (Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, and the European desk) emphasized how the exclusion of Italy would weaken the De Gasperi government and the pro-Western parties. But they also stressed the emancipatory effects assured to Italy by becoming a member of the Atlantic *communitas* it represented for the Italian government a decisive step toward re-entering the international arena and re-assuming its sovereignty, after the defeat of World War II and the punitive peace which ensued. However, this emancipation was based on the willingness of the Italian government to accept the binary and dichotomous premises on which the Cold War rested. The paradox was in many ways inscribed in the notion of 'community' itself: an instrument consolidating and extending the sovereignty of its members (in this specific case, the possibility for Italy to become

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<sup>8</sup> In that occasion De Gasperi accused the United States of treating Italy as a colony. See S. Chillè, *I riflessi della guerra di Corea sulla situazione italiana*, "Storia Contemporanea", n.5, ottobre 1987, 895-926 and C. Spagnolo, *La polemica sul "Country Study", il fondo lire e la dimensione internazionale del Piano Marshall*, "Studi Storici", 37, gennaio-marzo 1996, 95-110.

<sup>9</sup> The minutes of Washington's explanatory talks preceding the ratification of the Atlantic Pact can be found in United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1948, III: Western Europe, and 1949, IV: Western Europe*, pp.49-342 and pp.1-280, US Government Printing Office, Washington DC, 1974 and 1975. Among the negotiating countries only France openly supported Italian admission.

a fully contributing member of the Atlantic alliance, be rearmed and regain therefore the military capacity forbidden by the Peace Treaty) on condition they accept the surrender of part of that sovereignty (which for Italy meant the loss of even the theoretical possibility to have an autonomous foreign policy or, more concretely, the acceptance in the future of foreign military bases and personnel on its territory)<sup>10</sup>.

During the first years of the Cold War, the divergences between the ECA's 'New Dealers' and State Department geopolitical experts often impaired the consistency and effectiveness of American policy in Italy. Nonetheless, the plans of the two groups shared a common radicalism that stood in contrast to the process of political and economic stabilization promoted by the DC. With the intensification of Cold War tensions, the ambitious projects to promote a sweeping transformation of the Italian socioeconomic fabric were replaced by a more direct effort against the organizational structure of the PCI and of the Communist trade union (*Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro*, CGIL). American intervention in Italy shifted from a *positive containment*, whose goal was a 'conversion' of the country, to a *negative containment*, aimed at putting an end to the Italian anomaly, not by curing it, but, more simply, by removing it.

b) *Negative containment, 1950-1953*

During the last two years of the Truman administration the United States began to abandon an economic response to Italy's post World War II problems, and decided to resort to more drastic measures against the PCI. The development and the growth promoted with the Marshall Plan aid appeared now an insufficient instrument to counter the threat represented by the PCI. The emphasis thus gradually shifted from a positive form of containment of Italian Communism, largely based on an optimistic faith in the capacity of social and economic engineering to reduce and de-radicalize the level of political conflict, to a more dynamic and negative effort against the PCI. The radicalization of the bipolar competition between the United States and the Soviet Union led Washington to promote an effort to 'close the ranks' within the Western alliance: the exhortation of the most famous National Security Council

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<sup>10</sup> R. Esposito, *Communitas. Origine e destino della comunità*, Torino, Einaudi, 1998. See also "Text of Secretary's Acheson Broadcast on Atlantic Accord", *New York Times*, March 19, 1949. Acheson's intervention was decisive in convincing Truman to accept Italy in the Atlantic Alliance. See Memorandum of conversation Acheson-Truman, 28 February 1949, *FRUS, 1949*, V, 125.

document of the period, NSC 68, to create a “healthy international community” seemed to target first and foremost the anomalies – such as those represented by the Italian Communist party – that impaired the unity, the cohesion, and in last instance the very ‘healthiness’ of the U.S. led anti-Communist bloc<sup>11</sup>.

Following the inception of the Korean War, the United States intensified its pressures on the Western European countries, seeking for a greater participation in the common effort against the Soviet Union and international Communism, mainly through the promotion of a vast process of rearmament. This new approach was matched by the request that local governments assume a tougher posture toward domestic ‘subversive’ trade unions and political groups. The passivity of the Italian government in adopting more drastic actions against the PCI, its conservative fiscal approach, which prevented the promotion of expansive economic policies necessary for the process of rearmament demanded by Washington, and what was perceived as an insufficient commitment to Atlantic solidarity led many United States officials to criticize the Italian government and pressure for a change of direction. These requests became more intensive during 1951-52, when the results of two consecutive local elections (the first nation-wide polls since 1948) strongly disappointed Washington. The substantial defeat of the governmental forces, and especially of those lay Center-Left parties (Republicans and Social-Democrats) that represented the natural interlocutors of the United States, and the successes of the pro-Soviet Left (Socialists and Communists) and of the Right (neo-Fascists and Monarchists) seemed to pave the way for a radical bipolarization of the Italian political system that could squeeze the Center and benefit the Left. During the summer of 1951, the newly established Psychological Strategy Board [PSB] elaborated plans for intervention in Italy and France that became known by the codenames of *Demagnetize* (later *Clydesdale*) and *Cloven* (later *Midiron*). Based on the assumption that “the doctrine of economic determinism” was “too simple a hypothesis for France and Italy”, these plans provided for a series of measures the Italian and French governments should undertake under the guidance of the United States aimed at “reducing the strength and appeal of Communist Parties in France and Italy, with the ultimate objective of outlawing them.” Among these measures were the promotion of an attack against PCI organizational strength, designed to deprive it “of its material resources,” the removal of Communists “from administrative positions in schools and universities,” and from

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<sup>11</sup> NSC-68, “United States Objectives and Programs for National Security”, 14 April 1950, in Thomas H. Etzold e John Lewis Gaddis *Containment: Documents on American Policy and Strategy, 1945-1950*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1978, 385-442.

“posts of responsibility in public administration and the national economy,” and the reduction of Communist presence in the labor movement through an increase in the discrimination “against firms employing Communist labor.”<sup>12</sup>

Wrapped in a bombastic rhetoric, these plans were extremely generic and vague. Besides, they were based on the unfounded assumption the Italian government would cooperate: its refusal to put in practice most of these projects thus exacerbated Washington’s resentment and frustration. Responding to the exhortations of the new American Ambassador, Ellsworth Bunker, to adopt a tougher stand against Italian Communism, De Gasperi reaffirmed the necessity to act within the law and the Constitution. The Prime Minister of Italy objected to American requests to remove Communist organizations from public properties, stressing the fact they had signed regular contracts with the government. The same negative answer was given to Bunker’s request to prevent the PCI from securing large-scale financial support through the payments industrialists were forced to make in order to trade with the Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries. According to the De Gasperi there was little the government could do, and in any case that trade was too important for Italian textile industry<sup>13</sup>. Finally, the intention to use off-shore military procurements [OSP] to oblige Italian entrepreneurs and politicians to adopt a tougher stand against Communist labor clashed with the ever-pressing electoral contingencies (Italians were called to vote three times between 1951 and 1953). The months preceding the crucial 1953 general elections saw a dramatic increase in the allocation of American aid to Italian firms. Nevertheless, this aid was used not to intensify

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<sup>12</sup> ‘French and Italian elections’, 6 July 1951, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Missouri (hereafter HSTL), Staff Member and Office Files: Psychological Strategy Board Files (hereafter SMOF-PSB), Box 11, folder: 091.4 Europe File # 1 [2 of 2]; PSB, ‘Meeting re official US Position vis-à-vis French and Italian Governments in their Relation to the Communist Party’, 9 July 1951, HSTL-SMOF-PSB, Box 11, folder: 091.4; PSB, Panel C, Subcommittee on ‘Present Actions’, ‘Reduction of Communist Strength and Influence in France and Italy’, 26 October 1951; ‘Minutes of Meeting of Sub-Panel to Panel C’, 5 November 1951, both in HSTL, SMOF, PSB, Box 24, folder: 334: Panel C; PSB, ‘Psychological Operations Plan for the Reduction of Communist Power (Code Name: Demagnetize)’, 21 February 1952, HSTL, SMOF, PSB, Box 7, folder: 091 Italy -- File #1 [3 of 3]; PSB, ‘Remarks by the Department of State member of the Psychological Strategy Board on the Psychological Strategy Plan for the reduction of Communist Power in Italy’, 21 February 1952, NARA, RG 59, Lot File 62D333, box 1, folder: PSB D-15. On the anti-Communist activities promoted in Italy during the 1950s see Mario Del Pero, *The United States and ‘Psychological Warfare’ in Italy, 1948-1955*, “Journal of American History”, 87, No.4 (March 2001), 1304-1334.

<sup>13</sup>Memorandum of Conversation Bunker-De Gasperi, 9.5.1952, National Archives and Record Administration, College Park, Maryland (hereafter RG 59, with filing information); 765.00/9-1852.

anti-Communist discriminatory actions, but - following a more traditional pattern - to inject American money in the Italian balance of payments, in the vain hope it could help the pro-Western parties at the polls<sup>14</sup>.

Thus in Italy, the Truman administration left a threefold legacy to its successor. First, the decision to adopt a more drastic approach vis-à-vis Italian Communism: unlike the early years of the Cold War (1947-1950), the achievements and strength of the PCI were to be interpreted mainly as a subversive phenomenon that had to be tackled through a vast array of repressive policies planned by the United States and put into action by its local allies. Second, a difficult relationship with Italy's government, where the substantial weakness of those forces on which Washington had initially placed its hopes, Republicans and Social Democrats, impeded them from contesting the hegemony of the DC<sup>15</sup>. Finally, a marked discrepancy between the absolute aims pointed out in American plans (and the maximalist rhetoric accompanying them), and the means the United States effectively had in its hands to achieve such goals. The attempt of the Eisenhower administration to come to terms with these contradictions led to a further shift of policy: removing ("rolling back" in the rhetoric of the time) Communism from the outpost it had conquered in Italy became one of the objectives of the new strategy of containment promoted by Washington.

c) *Roll back-Containment, 1953-55*

The defeat of the governmental parties in the elections of June 1953 marked the end of De Gasperi's political career and caused a further reappraisal of American policies in Italy. Under the leadership of De Gasperi, the DC had rapidly transformed into a moderately inter-class party, able to integrate the masses within the Italian political system and to assume a truly

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<sup>14</sup> The OSPs were orders for military items produced in Europe and destined to the armed forces of the producing country or to those of other NATO's members. They were paid directly in U.S. dollars. Bunker to Acheson, 4 June 1952, 9 July 1952 and 14 August 1952 in NARA, RG 59, 765.5MSP/6-452, 765.5MSP/7-952 e 765.5MSP/8-1452; John Foster Dulles to Rome Embassy, 23 January 1953, and Stassen (Director MSA) to John Foster Dulles, 2 March, RG 59, 765.5MSP/1-2353 and 765.5MSP/3-253.

<sup>15</sup> Italian lack of cooperation was frequently denounced by American officials in charge of the *Demagnetize-Clydesdale* plan, who accused the De Gasperi's government of being "less receptive" to American "political pressures" than it "had been a few years ago", and "not our natural allies in this campaign". PSB, 'Meeting *Cloven-Demagnetize Coordinating Committee*', 18 April 1952 and 25 April 1952, HSTL, SMOF, PSB, Box 23, folder: 334 Le- nap (Cloven Coordinating Committee).

national character no other party was able to match. His successors followed in large part his approach, which relied first and foremost on the maintenance of the DC's absolute centrality within the Italian political system. They did so, however, facing much more difficult circumstances, and in a party lacerated by internal struggles. As an outcome of the elections, the Christian Democrats lacked an absolute parliamentary majority like that enjoyed between 1948 and 1953, while the reduction to Lilliputian size of the DC's lesser allies made them even more reluctant to assume governmental responsibilities which might alienate the support of their traditional voters. In the following months, therefore, the DC would form minority and caretaker governments, trying to regain the lost consensus mainly through a reorganization of its party apparatus, and an often unscrupulous use of state intervention in the economic realm<sup>16</sup>.

The defeat of De Gasperi was in many ways also that of the centrist formula he had come to personify. In order to have a solid majority in the Parliament, it became necessary to enlarge the coalition to new actors, either on the Right (Monarchists) or on the Left (Socialists). Devoid of any cohesion, with an electoral base restricted to the Southern regions, the Monarchist Party rapidly disappeared from Italian political life. An 'opening to the Left', namely to the Socialist Party (*Partito Socialista Italiano*, PSI), was inevitably hindered by the PSI's neutralism in international affairs, by its strong ties with the PCI (the two leftist parties were allied in trade unions and several cities administered by the Left), and, most of all, by intransigent American opposition toward the PSI.

The political instability following the elections of 1953 led Washington to opt for a radical change of direction, which implied both a greater interventionism in Italian domestic affairs and the adoption of a more critical and rigid attitude toward the traditional vehicle of United States policies in Italy, the DC. Accepting the premise that Italy was very close to falling prey to Communism it became necessary to promote what the new US Ambassador to Italy, Clare Boothe Luce – borrowing John Foster Dulles' famous expression – would soon call an "agonizing reappraisal" of American policy in Italy<sup>17</sup>. This reappraisal was based on a more aggressive and unscrupulous use of American aid as an instrument of pressure, the mobiliza-

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<sup>16</sup> Francesco Malgeri, "De Gasperi e l'età del centrismo (1948-1954)" in Francesco Malgeri (ed.), *Storia della Democrazia Cristiana. II: De Gasperi e l'età del centrismo (1948-1954)*, Rome, Cinque Lune 1987, 191-249; Mario Rossi, *Una democrazia a rischio. Politica e conflitto sociale negli anni della guerra fredda* in *Storia dell'Italia repubblicana, I*, 911-1005. From 1948 to 1953 the DC had an absolute parliamentary majority, but De Gasperi preferred to form coalitions with the other centrist parties, which were also supported by the United States.

<sup>17</sup> Luce to Bedell Smith, 8 April 1954, *FRUS, 1952-54, VI*, 1672.

tion of new conservative groups not yet directly involved in Italy's political life and the opposition to the Keynesian economic projects elaborated by the left wing of the DC and progressively accepted by the new party leadership.

Paradoxically, in this new approach and in the attempt pursued by Luce to encourage a political mobilization of Italy's entrepreneurial world, we can find many elements of continuity with the logic that inspired several ECA's officials in Italy during the Marshall Plan years. Luce shared with them the assumption that Italy's economic, social, and cultural fabric needed to be drastically transformed in order to save the country from Communism. The obvious difference consisted in the kinds of modifications she tried to promote in these years. Luce's assault against the vaguely neo-Keynesian and deficit spending models of economic development adopted by the DC stemmed both from a new diagnosis of Italian problems and from the different cultural and political premises on which the Eisenhower administration operated. In this new diagnosis, the traditional Italian allies of the United States, the Christian Democrats, became themselves part of the problem.

Furthermore, Luce criticized the Italian policies of the Truman administration for not having used economic aid as a leverage to compel the adoption by the Italian government of discriminatory measures against the PCI and its militants, and for their incapacity to promote "the enlargement of free enterprise areas in the economy". The main consequence – Luce argued – was that of having allowed Italy to preserve (or even consolidate) the economic structure of the "corporate fascist state"<sup>18</sup>.

This interpretation of the policies followed by the Truman administration in Italy clearly simplified a much more complex picture: it did not express an understanding of the intrinsic pluralism of American action in Italy during the late 1940s/early 1950s (when ECA's Keynesian officials often clashed with the State Department's geopolitical experts), nor take into consideration the Italian government's resistance to American pressures for the adoption of a new model of industrial and economic relations. Nonetheless, to attack the DC (and to ask for a greater participation of industrialists and businessmen in Italian political life) was also a way to indirectly assault the New Deal and its legacy.

For these reasons the line followed by the Eisenhower administration in Italy was a major departure from previous United States policies. Differently from what has been usually thought, this departure did not consist simply in a more radical anti-Communist attitude:

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<sup>18</sup> Clare Boothe Luce to Eisenhower, April 1955, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas (hereinafter DDEL), Ann Whitman File (AWF), International Series, Box 33, Folder: Italy (7).

American requests to outlaw the PCI had begun already in 1951. For Eisenhower and Luce, removing the Communist malaise from the Western Bloc was the first crucial step of the process of consolidation of the Atlantic Alliance supported by the Republican administration. Making the Italian body politic 'healthy' meant modifying the nature of the DC as an anti-Communist force through the alteration of the system within which it operated.

Again, the radicalism of American projects clashed with DC resistance. At the end of 1954, the new DC Prime Minister, Mario Scelba, finally approved a package of measures against the Communist party and trade unions that was largely modeled on United States plans for Italy. Scelba's decision, however, soon proved to be a cosmetic as much as desperate attempt to consolidate his precarious position at home, by obtaining a formal American backing, and his government fell a few months later. His successor, Antonio Segni, overcame Luce's objections and rapidly moved to revoke Scelba's decision<sup>19</sup>.

Analogously, in the economic field, American opposition did not prevent the approval in late 1955 of the scheme of economic development elaborated by the DC Left wing. Its technical limits would soon manifest themselves in the inability of the plan to manage and control the impetuous and disorderly growth generated by Italy's economy during the second half of the 1950s, and to limit the corrupting influence gained by public monopolies. The economic development of Italy, therefore, took place within an 'Italian pattern' that ended up exacerbating several historical distortions of which the country suffered (first and foremost the north-south dualism), but did not immediately produce the political consequences United States officials feared - namely a rapprochement between the DC and the Socialist party as the first step toward the formation of a new government of national unity<sup>20</sup>.

## 2. The Soviet Union and the PCI

For many years Italian leftist historiography has minimized the tie between the Italian Communist party and the Soviet Union or, at least, played down its importance in shaping the PCI's domestic political behavior. The alleged 'Italian national road to socialism' theorized by Italy's postwar Communist leader, Palmiro Togliatti, has thus been described as an autonomously elaborated project aimed at offering a feasible alternative to the conservative path un-

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<sup>19</sup> Mario Del Pero, *L'Alleato scomodo. Gli USA e la DC negli anni del centrismo (1948-1955)*, Roma, Carocci, 2001.

<sup>20</sup> Fabrizio Barca, "Compromesso senza riforme nel capitalismo italiano" in Fabrizio Barca (ed.), *Storia del capitalismo italiano*, Rome, Donzelli, 87; Guido Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano*, Rome, Donzelli, 1997.

dertaken by the Christian Democratic governments. Such a project, it has often been argued, was nonetheless doomed to fail because of systemic international constraints, external pressures and, later, American military presence on Italian territory<sup>21</sup>.

The new documentary evidence surfacing in the archives of the PCI and the former Soviet Union, however, does not support this interpretation. Recently declassified documents show that Togliatti and his successors rarely acted without having previously consulted with Stalin and the Soviet leadership: even the most celebrated national decisions taken by the PCI were consistent with the more general aims of Soviet foreign policy<sup>22</sup>.

Alas, many recent studies have made a rough and clearly instrumental use of these new documents, presenting them as the unquestionable and ultimate proof the PCI was a subservient agent of Moscow's global designs, and, consequently, a subtle and willing accomplice of the Soviet brutal dictatorship. Once interpreted as a mere projection of Soviet policy, the entire experience of Italian Communism (and of its role in the foundation of the Italian democracy) has been de-legitimized, to the point of contesting even the democratic credentials (and therefore the legitimacy to govern) of the current PCI's heirs<sup>23</sup>.

The rigidity of both the 'autonomy' and the 'externally-directed' interpretative models of the history of Italian Communism inevitably leads to simplistic explanations. Understanding the reasons that led the PCI's leadership not to break with Moscow (despite the often intolerable Soviet demands) is an indispensable step toward comprehending how this influenced the domestic choices of the PCI and, consequently, Italy's political system.

The link between the Soviet Union and the PCI guaranteed to the latter relevant financial, symbolic, and political rewards. Financially, the money coming from Moscow represented the most conspicuous 'source of income' of the PCI and, after 1947, a vital element to match the

<sup>21</sup> Among the many see Ernesto Ragionieri, *La storia politica e sociale*, in *Storia d'Italia*, vol.IV, Einaudi, Torino, 1976; Mario Rossi, *Una democrazia a rischio. Politica e conflitto sociale negli anni della guerra fredda*; Francesco Barbagallo, *La Formazione dell'Italia democratica*, and Carlo Pinzani, *L'Italia nel mondo bipolare*, all in Francesco Barbagallo (ed.), *Storia dell'Italia repubblicana*, I and II, Torino, Einaudi, 1995.

<sup>22</sup> Silvio Pons, *Stalin, Togliatti, and the Origins of the Cold War in Europe*, "Journal of Cold War Studies", Vol.3, N.2, Spring 2001; Roberto Gualtieri, *Il PCI e la "doppia lealtà". Per una periodizzazione della storia del comunismo italiano*, paper presented at the conference *Il PCI nella storia dell'Italia repubblicana. Contributi per una storia nazionale e internazionale*, Istituto Fondazione Gramsci, Roma, May 25-26, 2000 (I am indebted to Roberto Gualtieri for having allowed me to see the yet unpublished version of his article).

<sup>23</sup> Elena Aga-Rossi and Victor Zaslavsky, *Togliatti e Stalin. Il PCI e la politica estera staliniana negli archivi di Mosca*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1997; Valerio Riva, *Oro da Mosca. I finanziamenti sovietici al PCI dalla rivoluzione d'ottobre al crollo dell'Urss*, Mondadori, Milano, 1999.

resources assured to the DC by its control of the state apparatus and American backing. Added to the sums granted to the PCI by acting as an intermediary in the trade between Italy and the countries of the Communist bloc, Soviet funds represented a significant percentage of the entire budget of the Italian Communist Party, and flowed uninterrupted from 1947 to 1980. Overall, the PCI was the 'foreign party' receiving the largest financial support from the Soviet Union: in the 1950s the funds earmarked to the PCI amounted to almost half of the total sum 'invested' by Moscow to support communist activities abroad<sup>24</sup>. Crucial as it was to sustain the growing costs of politics, Soviet help became nonetheless a 'double-edged weapon' for the PCI's leadership, exposing it to the constant blackmail of a possible reorientation of this help toward the most orthodox and pro-Soviet elements of the party.

Symbolically, the power of the Soviet myth in the immediate aftermath of World War II guaranteed to the PCI an invaluable instrument to capture the support of large strata of the Italian population. In addition, it offered a common denominator and an element of identity to a party still split into a largely Gramscian elite and a base which embraced the cult of Stalin and of the heroic struggle of the Red Army against the Nazi aggressors<sup>25</sup>.

Politically, the opposition of Stalin to hazardous revolutionary actions in Italy and Soviet implicit recognition of Italy being part of the American sphere of influence allowed Togliatti to keep in check the 'insurrectionist' faction of the party. Paradoxical as it may appear, the moderating influence of the Soviet Union contributed to the ability of the PCI to contain the pressures of its radical minority, which wanted to steer the party into a new civil conflict, and helped Togliatti to sustain his determination to keep PCI's opposition always within the limits fixed by the democratic constitution. Togliatti's hostility toward any insurrection action was never abandoned, even in the tensest moments of the Cold War: speaking with the Italian delegates to the first Cominform conference in September 1947, the PCI's secretary made clear the absolute necessity to avoid any action that could "turn Italy into another Greece"<sup>26</sup>.

The link with the Soviet Union represented therefore a 'constant' in the history of the PCI, at least up to the early 1980s. Consequently, the possibility for the PCI to reassume gov-

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<sup>24</sup> Valerio Riva, *Oro da Mosca*, Roberto Gualtieri, *Il PCI e la "doppia lealtà"*.

<sup>25</sup> Gian Carlo Marino, *Guerra fredda e conflitto sociale in Italia, 1947-1953*, Roma-Caltanissetta, Salvatore Sciascia editore, 1991, and Ivi, *Autoritratto del PCI staliniano, 1946-1953*, Editori Riuniti, Roma, 1991. Pier Paolo D'Attorre, *Sogno americano e mito sovietico nell'Italia contemporanea*.

<sup>26</sup> Eugenio Reale, *Nascita del Cominform*, Milano, Mondadori, 1958 quoted in Silvio Pons, *Stalin, Togliatti, and the origins*, 17. See also Silvio Pons, *L'impossibile egemonia. L'Urss, il PCI e le origini della guerra fredda (1943-1948)*, Roma, Carocci, 1999.

ernmental responsibilities came to depend from the overcoming of what, in the PCI's lexicon, was known as the *politica dei blocchi* (Blocs' policy or 'blocism'), namely the bipolar division of the European continent. Since international bipolarism proved to be systemically very stable, at least in Europe, the only other alternative path left to the PCI was to try to 'exploit' any relaxation in international tensions to re-form a coalition government with the DC. This possibility partially materialized, despite United States opposition, only in the late 1970s with the short-lived experience of the 'historical compromise' between the PCI and the DC.

Quite paradoxically, the tie between the Italian Communist Party and the Soviet Union made the PCI dependent not so much on eventual changes in the Soviet attitude toward Italian affairs, but instead on the evolution of the international and European situation (and therefore on American foreign policy), and the choices of the Christian Democrats. While offering the advantages previously illustrated, the link with Moscow prevented the PCI from representing a feasible alternative in the Italian political system: already in 1953/54 American contingency plans began explicitly to consider a military intervention in the Italian peninsula in case of a "legal" (i.e.: through an electoral victory) accession to power of the PCI<sup>27</sup>.

By not breaking with Moscow, PCI's freedom of action was severely circumscribed. This happened, however, not because the party was transformed into a docile and obedient puppet of the Soviet Union, but, more simply, because any possible assumption of governmental responsibility by the PCI was subordinated to changes that could be brought about only by external agents (the U.S. and the DC). The end of bipolarism, either through détente or the collapse of one of the two 'poles' (which, eventually, was what effectively occurred), and/or DC willingness to cooperate with the PCI were the two essentially 'independent' prerequisites to a Communist participation in the Italian government. A double dependency of the PCI both on the DC and the direction of U.S. foreign policy was thus ironically nourished by the USSR-PCI tie, and contributed in its way to further consolidating the domestic political hegemony of the Christian Democrats<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> Curiously enough, during the discussions on the new NSC document on Italy – NSC 5411/2 – US military contested the notion that a "subversive" and "totalitarian" party as the PCI could, because of its very nature, ever achieve power by "legal and legitimate" means. In the final text approved in April 1954 a compromise was reached by introducing the adverb "apparently" before the adjective "legal". The final formula was therefore: "In case the PCI gained accession to power by apparently legal means....". Radford to Wilson, 23 March 1954, FRUS, 1952-54, VI, 1665-1667; 190<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the National Security Council, 25 March 1954, DDEL, AWF, NSC Series, Box 5; NSC 5411/2, "U.S. Policy Toward Italy"; Mario Del Pero, *L'alleato scomodo*, 214-220.

<sup>28</sup> Roberto Gualtieri, *Il PCI e la "doppia lealtà"*.

PCI's absolute dependency on these 'external variables' was noticeably evident in the three different phases of containment (positive containment, negative containment, and roll-back containment) of the period 1947-1955. I will sketch the reaction of the PCI to the evolution of the U.S. strategy of containment in Italy, before trying to summarize the main characteristics of the Cold War in the Italian theater.

a) Positive containment, 1947-1950

The reaction of the PCI to the U.S. strategy of 'positive containment' was adamantly hostile. The opposition to the Atlantic pact struck an important chord in Italian public opinion, and was destined in the long run to pay a significant political dividend. But the hostility to the most innovative and reformist elements of U.S. policy, and the Marshall plan in particular, was bound to be rejected by Italian voters and thus inevitably self-defeating. Togliatti and the leadership of the party were conscious of this fact, to the point of vainly underscoring to their Soviet interlocutors the need to avoid flatly rejecting the plan<sup>29</sup>.

In 1947-49, the intensification of bipolar tensions, the creation of the Cominform, and the tightening of Soviet control over Western European Communist parties led the PCI to escalate the level of political and social conflict. These were the years of maximum political tension between the two main parties of the Italian political system<sup>30</sup>. Radical and counterproductive as it was, the PCI's maximalist stance continued to privilege propaganda over action. It maintained a defensive character, aimed at containing both the effective political offensive mounted by the United States and the DC, and the pressures of the Soviet Union. Even in the moments of maximum tension – as those preceding the elections of 1948 or following the attempt on Togliatti's life in July 1948 – the PCI continued to operate within the boundaries fixed by the democratic constitution approved a few months earlier. While a virulent and rough propaganda was used to exalt the image of a structural diversity of Italian communism, the decision to remain within the strict limits of a verbal and propagandistic maximalism confirmed once more the anti-insurrectionist commitment of Togliatti<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> Giovanni Gozzini e Renzo Martinelli, *Storia del partito comunista italiano. Dall'attentato a Togliatti all'VIII congresso*, Torino, Einaudi, 1998; Silvio Pons, *L'impossibile egemonia*.

<sup>30</sup> But not within the system itself, mainly because of external pressures the years 1953-55 were in many ways more dramatic.

<sup>31</sup> Paul Ginsborg, *A history of Contemporary Italy. Politics and Society, 1943-1988*, London, Penguin Books, 1990. Leonardo Paggi, *Violenza e democrazia nella storia della repubblica*, "Studi Storici", October-December 1998, 935-952.

Thus, between 1947 and 1950 the strategy of the Italian Communist Party was at the same time maximalist, propagandistic, self-defeating, and defensive. It was maximalist in its lexicon and contents, as made evident by the PCI autarkical economic projects, which had no relation whatsoever with the realities of world economic interdependence. It was exclusively propagandistic in its instruments and forms, despite the pressures for action coming from the 'insurrection' minority and part of the PCI's base. It was self-defeating, as the 1948 elections proved, because there was no possibility of opposing much needed American economic aid without paying a high price at the polls. Finally, it was defensive and reactive, because it represented a response to successful initiatives taken by others.

b) *Negative containment. 1950-1953*

The shift in the American strategy of containment, undertaken in 1950-51, represented a major threat to the survival of the PCI, whose banning was now explicitly requested by many U.S. officials. At the same, however, this shift offered to the PCI the first possibility to partially re-enter Italy's political interplay, after having been marginalized from it in the previous years.

The progressive militarization of American foreign policy that followed the inception of the Korean war and the approval of NSC-68 allowed the Western European communist parties, and the PCI in particular, to effectively embrace the cause of peace, promoting a highly successful campaign. Despite its stereotyped anti-Americanism, and its exploitation by the Soviet Union, the peace movement of the early 50s was able to take advantage of the strong anti-war feelings of large sectors of the European population and the growing fear of a nuclear war. In the specific Italian case, the peace campaign promoted by the PCI led to incredibly successful results: more than 16 million people signed the peace movement manifesto, and the PCI was able to open an important channel of communication with several DC dissidents and various catholic organizations<sup>32</sup>. Even in the dramatic days following the beginning of the Korean war, De Gasperi himself continued to maintain a skeptical attitude toward U.S. foreign policy, one that was deeply soaked in nationalist clichés: in a letter sent in July 1950 to Foreign Minister, Carlo Sforza, Italy's Prime Minister maintained that "Old Europe" was "wiser and

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<sup>32</sup> Giorgio Vecchio, *Pacifisti e obiettori nell'Italia di De Gasperi, 1948-1953*, Roma, Studium, 1993; Giovanni Gozzini, *Il PCI nel sistema politico della repubblica*, paper presented at the conference *Il PCI nella storia dell'Italia repubblicana*.

more expert” than “American kids (*anciulloni*)” and should therefore “say a firm word of peace.”<sup>33</sup>

Similarly, in the domestic field the PCI was able to present itself as the political force defending the constitutional rights now menaced by American psychological warfare projects and the extraordinary measures proposed by the De Gasperi government to “protect Italy’s democracy”. These measures provided for (a) the creation of a system of “civil defense”, and the conferring of “extraordinary powers” to the minister of Interior in case of “danger for the security of the country” (a very ambiguous formula which left much room for discretion); (b) the modification of several articles of the Italian penal code regarding military and economic sabotage (which came to include also workers’ occupation of factories); and (c) a stricter regulation of the right to strike<sup>34</sup>.

The decision to adopt these measures originated in the genuine fear of De Gasperi and most DC leaders (including now Dossetti) toward the possible internal subversion promoted by the PCI. If implemented, however, they would have represented the first step toward an authoritarian involution of the Italian republic. In reality, most of these measures were never approved by the Parliament or not even submitted to it. Part of the DC, the Social Democrats, and the Republicans (with the notable exception of minister of Defense, Pacciardi) opposed them because of their illiberal nature. On this occasion, De Gasperi’s behavior was extremely ambiguous: he initially supported these actions, but then refused to put up a political struggle to have them approved by the Parliament. The fate of the so-called ‘De Gasperi’s protected democracy’ seems to illustrate once more that the real goal of Italy’s Prime Minister was to prevent a radicalization of the tensions within the Italian political system, and to contain internal and external pressures asking for stronger anti-Communist action, deferring the adoption of the measures initially proposed<sup>35</sup>.

De Gasperi’s moderation emerged also in his resistance to the frequent Vatican requests to form a conservative and anti-Communist bloc, including the Monarchists and, if necessary, the neo-Fascists. Just like Togliatti, the DC leader was extremely wary of not stepping outside the boundaries defined by the constitution. But he also feared a new polarization of the political struggle along a Fascist/anti-Fascist axis that would further legitimize the PCI as the only

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<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Guido Formigoni, *La democrazia cristiana e l'alleanza occidentale*, 370. Despite American pressures, Italy’s participation to the war was just symbolic, and limited to sending a field hospital to Korea.

<sup>34</sup> S. Chillé, *I riflessi della guerra di Corea sulla situazione italiana*.

<sup>35</sup> Guido Formigoni, *La democrazia cristiana e l'alleanza occidentale*; Mario Del Pero, *L’alleato scomodo*.

'really' democratic mass party<sup>36</sup>. By doing so, I argue, he obtained the dual result of preserving Italy's democratic foundations and consolidating the DC's hegemony. In the early 1950s, in fact, Cold War dynamics and American strategies in Italy were paradoxically helping the transformation of the PCI into the 'constitutional party' *par excellence*, and creating therefore the preconditions for a potential Communist hegemony of Italy's democratic camp, which would polarize Italian politics and put at stake the survival of democracy. By "containing containment", De Gasperi consolidated DC's hold on political power (and guaranteed its perpetuation *sine die*), strengthened the 'non-structural' elements of the PCI's subaltern role (the structural ones being those depending on the international situation and on the USSR-PCI tie), and, finally, reduced the risk the country could be dragged into a new civil conflict.

c) *Roll-back containment, 1953-1955*

The PCI's behavior in the phase of roll-back containment was in many ways similar to that of the period 1950-1953. The virulent anti-Communist crusade promoted by U.S. ambassador Clare Boothe Luce and the growing strength of the Italian Right (both within the government and outside it) reinforced the democratic credentials of the PCI. In 1953 the PCI mobilized against the modification of the proportional electoral system and the adoption of a new electoral law, renamed "swindle law" (*legge truffa*), that granted 2/3 of the seats in the lower chamber to the coalition achieving 50% of the votes. The PSI and other non-Communist progressive forces joined Italian Communists in the campaign against the "swindle law". A small group of Republican, Liberal Democrat, and Social Democrat dissidents, led by Piero Calamandrei and former Prime Minister Ferruccio Parri, created their own electoral list, called *Unità Popolare* ("People's Unity"). *Unità Popolare* won only 0.5% of the votes: a mea-

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<sup>36</sup> The tensions between De Gasperi and the Vatican reached a peak in June 1952, when the DC leader successfully opposed the creation of an alliance between the Christian Democrats, the Monarchists, and the Neo-Fascists in the Rome municipal election. A few days later, the Pope refused to grant an audience to De Gasperi, whose daughter had just taken her veils as a nun. The letter written by Italy's Prime Minister to the Vatican's Secretariat of State to protest such a treatment remains impressive for its firmness and dignity: "As a catholic – De Gasperi wrote – I accept this humiliation, though I am unable to understand it. As Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of this country, the authority and role I represent, which I cannot put aside even in private relations, oblige me to express my surprise and to reserve myself the right to obtain an explanation". In Maria Romana Catti-De Gasperi (ed.), *De Gasperi uomo solo*, Milano, Mondadori, 1965, 335-336. Pietro Scoppola, *La repubblica dei partiti. Evoluzione e crisi di un sistema politico*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1997.

ger result compared to the expectations, but nonetheless sufficient to prevent the governmental coalition from achieving the 50%. The tacit alliance between the Communist and Socialist parties (running separately, unlike in 1948), and the progressive elements of the traditional lay allies of the DC defeated the *swindle law*. In several local elections, the PCI also tried, not always successfully, to form wide coalitions including not just the traditional Socialist partner, but also non-Socialist progressive groups irritated by DC's clericalism, Vatican pressures and anti-Comunist zealotry. The 1952 Rome municipal election was the model, when the Left united in a 'civic alliance', that included many radical liberals and was headed by Francesco Saverio Nitti, the famous former Liberal Prime Minister. Finally, the PCI tried to find in the cultural field an alternative terrain, where it could construct a counter-hegemony to the dominant political and economic one of the governmental and pro-Western parties: the results were ambivalent, but in the 1950s the PCI was able to gain the support of many non-Communist progressive intellectuals and hegemonize large sectors of high culture<sup>37</sup>.

After 1953, the main problem for the PCI was the marginalization of De Gasperi within the DC, and the consequent opening of a struggle for his succession. Several DC leaders lacked the commitment of De Gasperi to the defense of the constitution, and were more inclined to adopt harsher anti-Communist measures that were also necessary to gain American endorsement in the intra-party competition. This was particularly true in the cases of Giuseppe Pella (Prime Minister from August 1953 to February 1954) and, in part, Mario Scelba (February 1954-May 1955). The previously mentioned 'anti-Communist package of actions' approved by the Scelba government in December 1954 was largely a photocopy of the U.S. psychological warfare plans firstly elaborated in 1951-52. While its half-hearted implementation exacerbated Washington's resentment toward its Italian allies and barely affected PCI's organizational structure, the PCI used the episode to denounce the illiberal nature of the Christian Democrat regime and to pose itself once more as the real defender of political liberties and constitutional rights<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> Stephen Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow. The Italian Communists and the Challenge of Mass Culture, 1943-1991*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2000.

<sup>38</sup> Giovanni Gozzini e Renzo Martinelli, *Storia del partito comunista italiano*; Mario G. Rossi, *Il governo Scelba tra crisi del centrismo e ritorno anticomunista*, "Italia Contemporanea", n.197, 1994, 791-800; William Knight, *Position Paper 'Italian Government's Anti-Communist Program of December 4, 1954'*, 3.19.1955, NARA, RG 59, Lot Files 55D273&55D543 (Combined), Box 2, f. 'Scelba Visit. March 55'; and Durbrow to John Foster Dulles, 3.20.1955, NARA, RG 59, 765.00/3-2055.

When the first phase of international détente began to influence even Italy's political climate, the PCI was finally able to abandon its strident antagonism toward the DC, and take advantage of the credibility and legitimacy gained after 1950. Having resisted the offensive of 1951-55, and strongly benefiting from the relaxation in international tensions, the PCI was able to reassume an indirect, but nonetheless significant, role in policy-making. This happened primarily through the administration of several important cities. The experience of local government was, in fact, a crucial element used by the PCI to influence the political, social, and economic development of the country, but also to attune its political project (and the mentality of many of its members) to the realities of a capitalist and interdependent world. The new role of the PCI was evident in its increasing participation in the legislative activity of the Italian parliament. In the second half of 1955, Communist and Socialist parliamentarians often voted along with their Christian Democrat colleagues: a fact frequently overlooked in Italian historiography, but indignantly denounced at the time by Clare Boothe Luce and other American diplomats<sup>39</sup>.

This first moment of cooperation between the DC and the PCI was extremely significant: it showed again that any accession to power of the PCI could take place only in a subordinate role. In the following years the PCI would take part more actively in parliamentary legislative initiatives, to the point that almost 9/10 of the laws directly approved by the Parliamentary Committees received positive votes from PCI representatives. Consequently, Italy's political system came to be characterized also by a lack of correspondence between the "parliamentary" and "the governmental" majorities, though the PCI did not renounce the advantages derived from being at the same time "structurally diverse" in the system, and "functionally homogenous" to it<sup>40</sup>.

### **3. The Cold War and the Italian political system**

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<sup>39</sup> Clare Boothe Luce to Department of State, 19 August 1955, *FRUS*, 27, 290-292; Clare Boothe Luce to Herbert Hoover Jr., 18 August 1955, RG 59, Lot File 58D71, Box 6, folder: 350.03 OEEC Committee for Technical Development (EPA) (Vanoni Plan); Clare Boothe Luce to Department of State, 16 September 1955, RG 59, 865.00/9-1655; Tasca to Clare Boothe Luce, 18 February 1956, Clare Boothe Luce Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC (hereinafter CBLP-LOC), Box X60, folder: Subjects, memoranda, Interoffice, 1956.

<sup>40</sup> Giovanni Gozzini, *Il PCI nel sistema politico della Repubblica*, Massimo Morisi, *Le leggi del consenso. Partiti e interessi nei primi parlamenti della Repubblica*, Catanzaro, Rubbettino 1992.

Through an analysis of the first post-World War II decade, I have tried to discern a series of constants that has characterized Italy's experience during the Cold War. In this last section, I will summarize them and try to identify some useful conceptual tools to better understand the history of the Italian republic and the impact of international dynamics on it.

The first aspect I want to underline is represented by the clash between the radicalism of American plans for Italy, and the conservatism of the DC political project. By radicalism, I mean the assumption that Italy needed a drastic transformation of its political, economic, social, and cultural fabric in order to become a fully legitimate member of the Atlantic *communitas*. Such an assumption characterized the 'Italian policy' of Washington. It was shared, from opposite perspectives, both by ECA's new-dealers, and by laissez-faire and anti-Communist libertarians such as Clare Boothe Luce and her main economic adviser, Henry Tasca. While the former supported projects of modernization based on deficit-spending models and drastic economic and social reforms (such as the land reform in the south), and strongly denounced DC's clerical tendencies, the latter demanded a liberalization of the omnivorous public sector, the dismantling of inefficient monopolies, the more active participation of Italy's business community in the political life of the country and, by urging the outlawing of the PCI, a modification of Italy's constitutional foundations. In both instances, the Italian particular was rapidly inscribed in a Western universal, consequently losing its historical, political, and cultural peculiarities. However, this radicalism collided with the intrinsic conservatism of the centrist and moderate stabilization promoted by the Christian Democrats. The DC hegemonic project was based first and foremost on the capacity to contain drastic fractures with the old order, and to co-opt part of the structure (and many important public officials) of the former fascist regime. Containing discontinuity (and, consequently, "containing containment") was a crucial precondition of the stabilization promoted by the DC. The PCI, which shared with the DC a strong nationalism, certainly helped this process, by approving an amnesty allowing many former Fascist officials to maintain their position within the Italian state apparatus (Togliatti was minister of Justice at the time), and voting in favour of the article 7 of the Constitution which endorsed the 1929 *Concordato* between the Italian state and the Vatican.

The "containment of containment" of the Christian Democrats, however, was not caused only by the incompatibility between American reformist goals and DC conservatism. Several other elements influenced the decisions and actions of De Gasperi and his successors. Political opportunism certainly helps to explain the lukewarm reception given by Christian Democratic representatives to American pressures. Guaranteed American economic support and

military protection, through the inclusion of Italy within the Western security system, Christian Democrats consistently followed a *do ut des* logic, frequently modeling their 'Atlanticism' to the possibility of obtaining additional aid and concessions from Washington. This strategy could be implemented only by preserving the presence of a strong (but not too strong) Communist Party, which obliged the U.S. to support the DC (as the only reliable interlocutor Washington had in Italy), consequently strengthening its hold on political power.

But opportunism was not the only motivation. This is the second aspect I want to emphasize. As we have seen, the DC's actions originated also from the desire to safeguard Italy's constitutional equilibrium and prevent the risk of a new civil conflict. De Gasperi and many others within the DC were aware that the Cold War imperatives of the anti-Communist struggle could provoke an authoritarian regression in Italy, and this was potentially threatening to the DC itself, or at least to its most democratic representatives. In Italy, the Cold War entailed a clash between two different principles of legitimacy that defined inclusion and exclusion within the international alliance of which Italy was a member, and in the Italian political system itself. The 1948 Constitution was in fact based on the mutual recognition between the two Italian mass parties (Christian Democracy and Communist Party), a recognition that was instead lacking in the international context. As noticed by Italian historian Franco De Felice, Italy was the only case in Europe where there was no "convergence on the strategic choices" between the two main parties (DC and PCI)<sup>41</sup>. Nevertheless, the Constitution fixed the limits of this hostility. Applying Carl Schmitt's categories to the Italian political system, I argue that even in the most tense moments of the Cold War Christian Democracy never ceased considering the PCI as a *justus hostis*, a legitimate enemy to be defeated rather than eliminated as the United States would have wished. This difference was brutally, but unequivocally summarized by State Department representative in the Psychological Strategy Board, Walter Walmsley, when he urged the Italian government "to treat Italian Communists as Communists rather than Italians"<sup>42</sup>. Again, the particular represented by the Italian situation was rapidly inscribed by Washington within the general of the Cold War. However, it proved to be

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<sup>41</sup>Franco De Felice, *Doppia lealtà e doppio stato*, "Studi Storici", July-September 1989, 516. See also Franco De Felice, *Nazione e sviluppo, un nodo non sciolto*, in Aa.Vv., *Storia dell'Italia Repubblicana: sviluppo e squilibri. 1. Politica, economia e società*, Torino, Einaudi, 1995, 783-882, and Leonardo Paggi, *Violenza e democrazia*.

<sup>42</sup>PSB, Panel C, Sub-Committee on 'Present Actions', 'Reduction of Communist Strength and Influence in France and Italy', 10.26.1951; 'Minutes of Meeting of Sub-Panel to Panel C', 11.5.1951, both in HSTL, SMOF, PSB, Box 24, f. '334: Panel C'.

by Washington within the general of the Cold War. However, it proved to be impossible to fit that particular into the perimeter defined by the international situation<sup>43</sup>.

Finally, the question of how the international situation influenced the choices of the PCI and, more generally, the possibility for a leftist alternative to the DC governments. In contrast to the received interpretation, I suggest that the PCI was not simply a passive actor, impeded from undertaking governmental responsibilities by inescapable systemic constraints (namely, Italy's inclusion within the Western economic and security system). While international structural conditions did in effect prevent the PCI from re-entering the government after 1947, the PCI's choices were central in shaping and determining those conditions. The link with Moscow, with all the material and political advantages it provided to Italian Communists, ended up tying the eventual return to power of the PCI to the highly unlikely overcoming of the bipolar division of Europe or to the DC's acceptance of the PCI as an inevitably subordinate and junior ally.

The issue of the dependency of the PCI on external variables is therefore crucial to understanding the influence exercised by international dynamics on the evolution of the Italian political system. Here, I want to stress once more that PCI's real dependency was not on the Soviet Union. During the Cold War the Italian policy of the Soviet Union was mainly a constant. The PCI represented for Moscow primarily a propagandistic tool: a useful outpost in the citadel of Western capitalism, but not an instrument to alter what Soviet leaders considered a very convenient equilibrium in the European continent.

What I argue, instead, is that the link with the Soviet Union made the PCI extremely vulnerable to two other external variables: American foreign policy and the DC's decisions. In the early 1950s, U.S. plans for Italy threatened the very existence of the PCI, but also gave it the opportunity to pose as the party defending peace and the constitution, and to use its anti-Fascist credentials to further legitimize itself. Christian Democratic policies, instead, were crucial to the PCI not just because the only option left to re-enter the government was in a PCI-DC *Groaekoalition*, but also because the survival of the Italian Communist Party came to depend on the capacity and the willingness of the DC to continue to recognize the PCI as a *justus hostis* and to contain American pressures.

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<sup>43</sup>On the *justus hostis* versus the absolute enemy see Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, "Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik", LVIII, 1927, 1-33; and *Der Begriff der Piraterie*, 'Völkerbund und Völkerrecht', IV, 1937, 351-354. See also Anders Stephanson, *Fourteen Points on the Very Concept of the Cold War*, in Geraróid Ó Thuatail e Simon Dalby (eds.), *Rethinking Geopolitics*, London/New York, Routledge, 1998, 62-85.

Hence, the structural subalternity of the PCI, made it impossible for it to represent a feasible (and much needed) political alternative to the Christian Democrats. By 'containing containment', the DC was able to consolidate its hegemony and its almost monopolistic control of the state apparatus, exploiting the latter (often through an unscrupulous use of public money as an instrument of consensus-building) to extend the former. This monopoly of power was intrinsically conducive to corruption, and to the further consolidation of the Left's subaltern role in the Italian political system. But it also contributed in many ways to the preservation of Italy's constitutional democracy. Only by understanding these contradictions we can try to assess the results of the DC's strategy to "contain containment", and to fully comprehend the experience of the Italian democracy during the Cold War.