

Italy: an aspiring mediterranean middle power wavering between bilateralism and multilateralism



Itália: uma potente potência média mediterrânea oscilando entre bilateralismo e multilateralismo

Italia: una aspirante a potencia media mediterránea oscilante entre bilateralismo y multilateralismo

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ABSTRACT

Italy managed to be an important actor in European affairs, its status as middle power was several times called into question. Italy's domestic political instability, the frequent government crises, severe economic and financial problems hinder the country's goal to become a recognized middle power, especially in the Mediterranean region. Bilateral and multilateral tools are used alternately by government coalitions to carry out foreign policy which has been dominated by migration. Due to the afore-mentioned internal problems security and defence policy is not capable of supporting foreign policy to the necessary extent.

Keywords: Italy. Mediterranean. Middle power. Armed forces. Foreign policy.

RESUMO

A Itália conseguiu ser um ator importante nos assuntos europeus, seu status de potência média foi questionado várias vezes. A instabilidade política doméstica da Itália, as frequentes crises governamentais, os graves problemas econômicos e financeiros dificultam o objetivo do país de se tornar uma potência média reconhecida, especialmente na região do Mediterrâneo. Ferramentas bilaterais e multilaterais são usadas alternadamente por coalizões governamentais para levar a efeito a política externa que foi dominada pela migração. Devido aos problemas internos acima mencionados, a política de segurança e defesa não é capaz de apoiar a política externa na medida necessária.

Palavras chave: Itália. Região mediterrânea. Potência média. Forças armadas. Política externa

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RESUMEN

Italia logró ser un actor importante en los asuntos europeos, su condición de poder medio fue cuestionada en varias ocasiones. La inestabilidad política interna de Italia, las frecuentes crisis gubernamentales, los graves problemas económicos y financieros obstaculizan el objetivo del país de convertirse en una potencia media reconocida, especialmente en la región mediterránea. Las herramientas bilaterales y multilaterales son utilizadas alternativamente por coaliciones gubernamentales para llevar a cabo una política exterior que ha estado dominada por la migración. Debido a los problemas internos antes mencionados, la política de seguridad y defensa no es capaz de apoyar la política exterior en la medida necesaria.

Palabras clave: Italia. Mediterráneo. Poder medio. Fuerzas Armadas. Política exterior.

Introduction

Ever since the end of World War II – but more from the Risorgimento – Italy always tried to be recognized as a real European power, preferably equal to France and Great Britain, its goal has been entering the restricted club of decision maker major powers. Italy has always defined itself as a middle power, although its international ranking is constantly changing, it can be considered as “the last one amongst the big ones, first one amongst the small ones.” (BONVICINI; COLOMBO, 2011, p. 12).

The aim of this paper is to analyse the main directions of Italian foreign and security policies and the intrinsically linked development of its armed forces during the crisis of the so called “second republic”. We intend to analyse the military strength and also the foreign and security strategies of this middle power. The first chapter of the study provides a conceptualisation of middle powers and displays the main characteristics based on which we consider Italy a middle power. We provide a general outlook on how middle powers have been discussed by scholars in academic literature. The second chapter examines the main directions of Italian foreign policy, the third one analyses the most important strategic documents, then the current programme of forces development (*Documento Programmatico Pluriennale, DPP*) is displayed. The main trends of defence expenditures and Italy’s contribution to international missions are analysed in the last part of the study. Using the methodology of document analysis, this research is based on governmental and parliamentary sources, news items, speeches, interviews and reports.

Italy as a middle power

The definition of middle powers, their structure, their role and their behaviour has become subject of studies only after the end of the bipolar era when researches started to focus on the relationship between the US and its minor allies. However, the academic interest towards the concept of middle powers is still scarce, even though the bipolar system represented an exception in the history of international politics, as previous centuries were characterised by a multipolar power system, where

the most stable political entities were middle sized. Historian Paul Kennedy states that throughout the 19th century middle powers were the decisive actors in the international arena (KENNEDY, 1987). As for a long time middle powers were characterised as ‘good international citizens’ without further specifics, no commonly accepted definition exists. In our analysis we accept Adam Chapnick’s functional definition according to him middle powers are basically small powers which temporarily evolve to a middle status as a function of their contribution to a specific international issue (CHAPNICK, 1999).

Several attempts were made to classify states based on aggregated economic criteria. For example Holbraad made a classification of powers using GDP and population as indicators in his article ‘Middle Powers in International Politics’, however it resulted that both Japan and Nigeria can be defined as middle power in spite of the economical and other huge differences within these countries. As a result of these kind of analytical shortcomings, and of the fact that with qualitative tools it is hard to distinguish between regional powers and middle powers the quantitative approach has been abandoned and a qualitative approach started to dominate academic debates. Newer studies indicate that in the New World Order behavioural and diplomatic indicators are more decisive at the expense of military and economic factors, thus middle powers are defined by the dimension of their diplomatic networks and the issues promoted within the international community (BISCOTTINI, 2016). Studies using mixed methodology - combining statistical, normative and behavioural method - are the most recent attempts to redefine middle powers. J. Ping in his work *Middle Power Statecraft* aims at identifying middle powers in Asia and in the Pacific region first by collecting all the countries of the region based on the composition of international organizations then by using the following analytical tools: population, geographic area, military expenditure, GDP, GDP real growth, value of exports, GNI per capita, trade as a percentage of GDP and life expectancy at birth. There seems to be an accord among scholars about the behaviour of middle powers, many authors have defined middle power behaviour as characterized by such traits as mediation, coalition-building, multilateralism, and compromise brokerage (COOPER, 1997; COOPER; HIGGOTT; NOSSAL, 1997; HIGGOTT; COOPER, 1990; HOLBRAAD, 1971). Indeed, middle powers are most often characterized by their tactics: compromising, building coalitions, participating in international organizations, forging consensus and maintaining international order (STEPHEN, 2013).

[f]rom military point of view – based on capabilities – Martin Wright defined middle power as “a power with such military strength, resources and strategic position that in peacetime the great powers bid for its support, and in wartime, while it has no hope of winning a war against a great power, it can hope to inflict costs on a great power out of proportion to what the great power can hope to gain by attacking it. (WRIGHT, 1978, p. 65)

Since all of the above mentioned definitions have shortcomings, we use synthetic concept of middle power as it was stated by Matthew Stephen: firstly, middle power should denote a state with middling material capabilities. Secondly, only those states with middling material capabilities and the behavioural traits of middlepowermanship qualify as

middle powers. In other words, both middle capabilities and middle power behaviour are necessary conditions for middle power status, but only simultaneous fulfilment of both criteria is *sufficient* to qualify as a middle power (STEPHEN, 2013).

Based on our accepted definition, Italy can be considered a middle power from behavioural and functional points of views. Italy is member of the G7, it is one of the oldest supporter and one of the funding members of the European integration process. Italy is an active participant of international peace keeping missions and operations According to the 2018 statistics of the International Monetary Fund Italy has the eighth economy in the world (INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND, 2018). In military strength rankings Italy has been ranked somewhere between the eighth-eleventh place for the last few years, from Europe it has been outranked only by France, the United Kingdom and Germany (GLOBAL FIREPOWER, 2018). From the fifties U.S. tactical nuclear weapons have been stationed on Italian soil. At the same time it has to be highlighted that France and the United Kingdom have always been more visible and active within the NATO and the European Union, due to several reasons: Italy's domestic political instability, the frequent government crises, severe economic and financial problems as a consequence of slow increase or stagnation of Italian economy since the middle of the nineties all hindered Italy's international activity and damaged its reputation. In spite of its internal problems Italy is actively participating in international organizations, promoting multilateralism which usually prevails over bilateralism in its foreign policy.

Main directions of Italian foreign policy

Italian foreign policy's strategic framework can be considered stable since it was formed after the Second World War. Its pillars are European integration (EU); relations with the United States and the Atlanticism of NATO; and Mediterranean relations characterised mainly by bilateral relations with countries on the southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea and by the EU framework, the so-called Union for the Mediterranean (GILLI; UNGARO *et al*, 2015).

Although the strategic framework of Italian foreign policy remained mostly intact as the Second Republic was born at the beginning of the nineties, the centre of its gravity shifted often. In the centre of the foreign policy carried out by centre-right governments from the middle of the nineties we find Atlantic values: strong ties to the U.S. and Israel, and the intensification of bilateral relations driven by personal and economic relations, as it can be seen in the cases of Libya and Russia. In the same period the foreign policy of centre-left governments focused more on deepening European integration, they had a more open attitude towards Arab states, and preferred multilateralism over bilateralism. Altogether, in spite of the shifts of focus, Italian foreign policy can be characterised by a particular combination of bilateral and multilateral relations and by the so-called 'Levante approach' (BONVICINI; COLOMBO, 2011) which focuses on external trade policy considerations.

In its traditional foreign policy and geopolitical target areas (Balkans, Mediterranean, partly the Central European region) Italy has always been slightly confronting with other European powers (e.g. France, Great-Britain, Germany) which also wanted to extend their sphere of influence there. It has to be highlighted that Italy rarely played a decisive role in the international arena and even when it did, it was only for a short period, as it can be seen in the case of Libya. Italy was hit hard by the 2008 financial crisis and due to the long-lasting economic crisis, the international marginalisation of the country increased (BONVICINI; COLOMBO, 2010; COLOMBO, 2014).

Since the beginning of 2000s one of the main challenges of Italian security and foreign policy was how to tackle illegal migration. Before the Arab Spring (2011) Italian governments, lacking a genuine European migration and asylum policy, used bilateral tools to tackle illegal migration. During the period of 2001-2006 and of 2008-2011, political parties (especially the Northern League) of the centre-right governments of Silvio Berlusconi made illegal migration a national security issue.

The Second Republic of Italy plunged into a deepening internal and external, political and financial crisis in 2011. From this period on, Italian foreign and security policy's priorities focused explicitly on dual crisis management: addressing the financial-economic problems and challenges posed by illegal migration. In 2011 the sovereign debt crisis reached Italy, and the Italian sovereign debt market was on the brink of collapse which could have meant that Italy would have to leave the Eurozone. In the same year the deteriorating security situation resulting from the Arab Spring and from the collapse of Gheddafi's system in Libya lead to the increase of illegal migration through the Mediterranean Sea. Italy's situation was aggravated by the fact that the head of the centre-right government, Silvio Berlusconi's international reputation eroded gradually and the country sank into a foreign political isolation in the second half of 2011. After Berlusconi resigned in November 2011, Mario Monti's technocratic government tried to improve Italy's situation. Even though Monti's foreign policy did not differ significantly from its predecessor's policies, the country's international reputation improved considerably after he was appointed Prime Minister. Monti emphasised the importance of multilateral relations, in contrast to Berlusconi's preference of bilateral and personal relations (MOLNÁR, 2012).

After the Arab Spring, the collapse of Libya posed new challenges for Italian politics. The Italian governments of recent years have dealt with illegal migration using both bilateral and European crisis management tools. Although the major Italian political parties have been divided over the governments' responses to illegal migration since 2013, the Italian governments have managed to balance realist (pragmatic) and "Europeanized" approaches.

Following the financial and political crisis of 2011 several coalition governments based on the cooperation of centre-left and centre-right parties tried to strengthen Italy's international role in order to avoid international marginalisation. Since 2011 several Italian diplomats have achieved key positions within European institutions: Mario Draghi in the Euro-

pean Central Bank, Federico Mogherini as High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Antonio Tajani as President of the European Parliament, General Claudio Graziano as head of the EU's Military Committee. These improved Italy's negotiating power and reputation, and the country's foreign policy became more visible for the European Union. However, this trend has been reversed by the Conte administration's more Eurosceptic attitude, and Italian foreign policy became once again more confrontational.

From 2011, in the period of dual crisis management Italian governments put focus on European integration – while maintaining strong Atlantic relations – since they considered the European Union an adequate tool for crisis management and thereby for the representation of national interests. After the general elections of 2013, during the XVIII legislature three coalition governments were in power: Enrico Letta's government (from April 2013 to February 2014) was followed by Matteo Renzi (February 2014 to December 2016) and then by Renzi's former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Paolo Gentiloni (from December 2016 to the end of the legislature). The foreign policy of all three above-mentioned governments concentrated on addressing the challenges of economic-financial problems and migration-refugee crises. On the whole, Italian national interests were represented in a European disguise, a federalist EU policy with the explicit goal of deepening European integration was in the centre of Italian foreign policy.

After almost 400 migrants drowned near Lampedusa in October 2013, the Letta government approved 'Mare Nostrum' humanitarian-military mission (DA MARE..., 2017). The primary goal was to manage the crisis on European level, and Italy became the main advocate of EU's joint action. In 2014 during the Italian Presidency of the European Council, migration became one of the key priorities (PREZIDENZA ITALIANA DEL CONSIGLIO DELL'UNIONE EUROPEA, 2014). However, the realization of the ambitious foreign policy goals was hindered by the insufficiency of human and material resources at disposal (MAGRI, 2013).

'The European Union remained the principal field of action of Italian foreign policy during the Renzi government: the country expressed itself in favour of a joint European action in order to reduce migratory pressure. By actively contributing to the EU's public discourse about migration, Italy's foreign policy goal was to avoid further marginalization and to strengthen the country's role in the integration. However, the internal structural problems (e.g. high public debt, lack of economic growth) set back Italy's efforts to carry out decisive foreign policy (GRECO, 2016).

The Italian Presidency of the Council in the second part of 2014 contributed significantly to the improvement of the country's reputation. Federica Mogherini's appointment as High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy can be seen as the success of Italian diplomacy's activities. In November 2014 the unilateral Italian mission of Mare Nostrum was replaced by Frontex's Triton operation. This was an important step for Italy and even though Triton's scope and budget was remarkably smaller, it was a joint European mission. In 2015 partly due to

an Italian proposal and to the active role of High Representative Mogherini, the EU decided to enlarge the scope and budget of Triton; to start EU-NAVFOR MED joint military operation and to elaborate the main pillars of common migration and asylum policy.

Italian governments actively contributed to the debate on the future of European defence. In August 2016 the Gentiloni-government elaborated the plan of the so-called 'Schengen for Defence', a plan for a deeper integration in the field of common security and defence. It proposed two possible solutions: building on the potential of the Lisbon Treaty (strengthening the cooperation of PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation), the 44th article or the defence industry) or creating a so-called 'Schengen for Defence'. In the latter case a group of member states – first of all the founding members – would create a multinational European force with its own budget and command under the 'Schengen for Defence'. According to the plan the cooperation would be open for other member states to join. This new form of cooperation would then be transposed gradually into the EU Treaties (GENTILONI; PINOTTI, 2016; MOLNÁR, 2018a).

After Matteo Renzi resigned, Paolo Gentiloni took his position as Prime Minister. Gentiloni pursued the same foreign policy by focusing on joint, EU-level solutions and bilateral negotiations in order to address migration and refugee crisis to stop the flow of illegal migrants arriving via the central Mediterranean route. At the same time Italy supported by all possible means the internationally recognized Government of National Accord in Libya (e.g. the Hippocrates mission, deployment of two military ships to Libya and the decision to send 100 *Carabinieri* to Libya's southern border) (MINISTERIO DELLA DIFESA, 2016). Italian Special Forces have been deployed to Libya since 2016 (RAME, 2016). The first signs of reducing migration successfully emerged while the Gentiloni-government was in power. The role of Minister of Interior Marco Minniti cannot be denied in the process, since he was responsible for negotiating and concluding agreements with smaller Libyan power groups (PARAVICINI, 2017).

The decades old economic problems, the lack of expected growth, the protracted addressing of illegal migration from Libya had a negative effect on the re-election chances of the ruling coalition led by Gentiloni. Parallel to this process, the public confidence in European institutions declined significantly (EUROBAROMETER, 2018).

After the general elections of 2018 Lega and Movimento 5 Stelle gained power and made illegal migration a national security issue. The strategic planning of the new Eurosceptic and populist coalition differs considerably from the former governments', it does not follow the 'traditional' directions of the last decades. The Eurosceptic government's most spectacular foreign policy shift is the alienation from the German-French political trends.

The Conte-government's rhetorical goals are in a clear contrast with previous governments. Rome – opposed to the will of the previous government – did not support the participation in the European Intervention Initiative proposed by French President Emmanuel Macron (DIBEN-

EDETTA, 2018). The new government's position on addressing migrant and refugee crisis became more radical, as it was confirmed when Italian ports were shut down in front of the rescue ships of NGOs. Although the number of conflicts between Rome and the EU is growing, it needs to be highlighted that Italy is still interested in a European solution.

As it was shown, Italian foreign policy became gradually dominated by the tackling of illegal migration since the beginning of the 2000s. This trend was given a new impetus by the Arab Spring and the collapse of Libya, as security aspects of the problems became more evident, urgent steps needed to be taken by Italian decision-makers. The governments alternated bilateral and multilateral tools in search of an effective solution, however in the absence of a functioning common refugee and asylum policy, bilateral relations tend to be preferred in tackling migration, while multilateral relations – through the financial mechanisms of the EU – are used to handle economic and financial problems. The bilateral handling of illegal migration is strengthened by the fact that the new government coalition explicitly made migration a national security issue.

Strategic documents of Italian foreign and security policy

3. Libro bianco della Difesa

In spite of pressing foreign policy challenges, no foreign and security policy strategy was prepared on a national level until 2015. Even though a number of strategic documents existed, there was no real, comprehensive national security strategy, the White Book of Defence³, 2002 (MINISTERO DELLA DIFESA, 2002) can be considered the last one. This White Book focused on new threats - mainly ethnical conflicts - arriving from the South and South-East; in sharp contrast with the White Book of 1985 which put the bipolar world's traditional East-West confrontation in the centre of its attention. The new White Book paid particular attention to the threats emerging after 9/11 and on global war on international terrorism. In connection with the afore-mentioned threat, armed forces had new tasks: the focus of their activities shifted from direct area protection to international missions, from military personnel to infrastructure and equipment. In this period the new goal of increasing defence expenditures emerged (MINISTERO DELLA DIFESA, 2002).

Another document setting out the directions of foreign and security policy was the 'Report 2020 – choices of foreign policy' prepared in 2008 during the Prodi government. The Report emphasized three main areas of crisis zones: Western Balkans, the so-called enlarged Mediterranean (*Mediterraneo Allargato*) and Afghanistan, as a clear clarification of the fact that from the Italian point of view crises zones had moved from the East to the South. As a consequence of its geographic location, Italy is particularly exposed to threats arriving from these areas, but at the same time it has to be taken into account that these zones are economically important for Italy. This document gave priority to the tackling illegal migration coming from the Balkans and the Mediterranean Region. According to this strategy it was not enough to rely on bilateral treaties, but more international and European cooperation were needed (DASSÚ; MASSARI, 2008).

Even though no official medium- and long-term strategy was submitted, we can interpret the annual decree of the Minister of Defence about next year's security duties⁴ as a short-term strategic framework for Italian armed forces. The decree analyses international environment, security duties and financial resources needed to their realization on an annual basis.

The lack of a comprehensive foreign and security policy framework had been apparent even before the necessary reforms were started. The public and political debate in progress since the Berlusconi government about the acquisition of 90 F35 Joint Strike Fighter revealed the necessity for elaborating reform plans. After the political, public and stakeholder debate in 2014 the new White Book on Italian foreign and security policy was published in 2015 (MINISTERO DELLA DIFESA, 2015).

The White Book aimed at preparing the reorganization of armed forces and at continuing to carry out the reforms started in 2012 by then Minister of Defence Giampaolo Di Paola. Structural and budgetary reorganisation was a primary goal of the reform process. Based on this document, the first pillar of Italy's security is the European Union, the second one is NATO, however, strong ties to the countries of the transatlantic region and active participation in joint initiatives are equally important. Regarding the EU, the White Book determined Italian support to deepen Common Security and Defence Policy and emphasized the importance of cooperation between NATO and the European dimension of defence.

International organizations, responsible involvement in their initiatives and in international missions have a fundamental role in safeguarding national interests. On the whole Italy's security is based on three pillars favouring multilateral relations: 1) European integration, 2) strong transatlantic relations (NATO), and 3) Global relations (UN) (MINISTERO DELLA DIFESA, 2015). Compared to previous documents, this White Book's approach can be valued as more pragmatic, it emphasized more the importance of national interests, so that development trends in defence policy can be more easily determined. Parallel to the elaboration and approval of the 2015 White Book, Italy expressed its renewed commitment to acquire 90 F35 fighter planes until 2027.

Since 2013 the Ministry of Defence has issued annually the *Plurenial Programmatic Document* (DPP) as a framework for defence expenditure, replacing the Minister's above-mentioned annual decree. The latest DPP regarding the period between 2018 and 2020 was submitted by Elisabetta Trenta Minister of Defence with a significant delay in November 2018. The document has been eagerly awaited since it provides information about the new government's vision regarding the defence sector. Structural changes cannot be detected in this DPP since many programmes, commitments, even 2018 defence budget had already been approved by the previous DPP, submitted and approved by the previous centre-left government. The system of submitting multiannual documents regarding the defence sector (e.g. DPP) guarantees continuity in armament programmes and international commitments, since the pillars of Italian defence can be modified only in part by the often changing governments. Similarly to previous documents, this DPP also

4. Nota Aggiuntiva allo Stato di Previsione della Difesa

analyses international security environment as a short-, medium- and long-term strategic framework, while related tasks and necessary financial resources are also displayed (MINISTERO DELLA DIFESA, 2018). Even though the latest DPP is quite similar to the previous one, the new concepts and interventions of the new Minister of Defence are slightly perceptible, not only in the political priorities (Annex D), but in the frequent use of the concepts “dual use” and “resilience”, which seem to be the guiding principles of the new document, however the 2018-2020 DPP can probably be considered as a transitional document. Since the current Italian defence strategy originates from previous DPPs as well, apart from examining the 2018-2020 DPP, we also take into consideration the contents of 2017-2019 DPP.

National commitment in the reference framework (Impegno nazionale nel contesto di riferimento).....

The first part of the current DPP analyses Italy’s international environment and determines national commitments based on the main strategic directions so that the specific armament programmes could be fitted into a coherent framework. By carrying out the armaments programmes according to the strategic development directions of the DPP, Italian armed forces should possess adequate capacities to address new threats, including guaranteeing economic and energy security and migration. It should be emphasized that in the latest DPP the following are considered to be factors of instability: terrorism, migration flows, natural disasters, calamities and organized crime, whereas military competition amongst states or hybrid conflicts would be secondary.

Italian geostrategic priorities remain the Euro-Atlantic, Euro-Mediterranean and Middle-Eastern regions. The first two are considered as a safety net and international engagement within the security triad of NATO-UN-EU, the third and fourth are considered more of a challenge. As a consequence, Italian armed forces need to possess the necessity capacities within the state borders and in the territories of the crises zones in order to address the afore-mentioned challenges.

The Euro-Mediterranean region is the first strategic direction: it should be interpreted as an open geopolitical region, where the effects of trends and crises occurring in the Sahel, Horn of Africa and in the Persian Gulf cumulate, affecting Italy directly through the Southern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. The current DPP highlights Libya, as the most important country in the region from Italian perspective: alongside their historical ties, Libya is a strategic priority for Italy due the security and energy security reasons (MINISTERO DELLA DIFESA, 2018). Libya is important to manage the flow of migrants and refugees arriving via the central Mediterranean route to Italy. According to FRONTEX, 170,664 people reached Italian shores mainly from Libya in 2014, while 153,946 did so in 2015, and 181,376 in 2016 and 118,962 arrived in 2017. Due to efforts of the EU and Italy only 23,485 people reached Italian shores in 2018 (FRONTEX, 2019). Italy imports oil and gas from Libya which was its sixth supplier of oil (5%) and the third

of natural gas (7%) in 2016 (ALDO, 2018; MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION, 2017).

Increasing the stability of the Mediterranean region is Italy's national security interest, in this region Italian armed forces should have the capacities to lead even multinational, coalition forces. In order to successfully decrease social tensions related to illegal migration arriving through the Mediterranean Sea, it will be a decisive factor for Italy how it can conduct a decisive foreign policy in the region, in spite of its limited defence expenditures and military capabilities, which are disproportionate to the country's economic potential and size (MOLNÁR, 2018b). Niger appears in the new DPP as a fundamental country for the security of the Sahel region (MINISTERO DELLA DIFESA, 2018). The appearance of Niger in the document is hardly surprising, considering that the bilateral defence agreement signed in 2017 resulted in the launch of a new Italian military mission in Niger which started in late 2018, when the new government was already in power.

Syria and Iraq are the most important crisis zones in the Middle East: besides jihadist threats, proxy wars of global and regional powers raise the level of instability, the use of military power might be necessary amongst political and diplomatic actions. The decrease of Iraqi and Lebanese tensions are national priorities for Italian defence policy, the reinforcement of their autonomous defence and security forces should be supported not only on multilateral, but even on bilateral level (MINISTERO DELLA DIFESA, 2018).

The DPP mentions shortly the Western Balkans and Afghanistan due to the ongoing military missions with significant Italian participation: KFOR in Kosovo and NATO-RSM in Afghanistan. The active participation in the security triad of the Euro-Atlantic region can be evaluated as Italy's contribution to international security and a safety shield for the country. Italian proactivity within the NATO is in line with the strategic priorities, since in the implementation of NATO's '*Framework for the South*' the Allied Joint Force Command in Naples plays a substantial role. Through its successful command Italy intends to strengthen its leading role in addressing crises emerging in the Mediterranean region. Regarding the European Union, Italy's responsible participation in the security of the Euro-Atlantic region equals to the realization of an actual and functioning Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), European Defence Agency and European Defence Action Plan (MINISTERO DELLA DIFESA, 2018). We need to highlight the fact that the renewed support for CSDP is slightly in contrast with the governing parties' Eurosceptic views.

The strategic directions of Italian security and defence policy are clearly reflected in multilateral (UN, NATO, EU) and bilateral military missions, the majority of missions are present in the countries at the shores of the Mediterranean Sea or in the African states alongside the major migration routes through the sea.

In connection with the international environment and strategic directions, it should be mentioned that the most important Italian document which can be considered as defence strategy for the country does

not mention Russia, in contrast with the so-called government contract. According to the contract between M5S and Lega – which constitutes the base of Giuseppe Conte’s government – there are three major regions to be considered priorities from the points of view of security and defence policy: NATO, Russia and the Mediterranean region (CONTRATTO..., 2018), however, the DPP does not reflect this ambition.

Development of the forces based on the current DPP (Sviluppo dello strumento militare).....

The second chapter of the document synthetizes the strategic guidelines, operational needs and the medium- and long-term development directions of Italian armed forces, furthermore analyses and evaluates the ongoing investment programmes. Even though this study does not aim at analysing the current armament programmes and projects, we should highlight the fact that the modernisation and maintenance of the materials and systems used by the Special Forces – which are more easily deployed in order to tackle new risks, such as the ones emerging the ‘enlarged Mediterranean’ region – is in progress. New equipment, such as optoelectronic devices for night vision or for the surveillance of special vehicles are to be acquired (MINISTERO DELLA DIFESA, 2018). Several projects, such as the modernisation of C-130J transport aircrafts, the maintenance of the operational capacities of the C27J fleet, the acquisition of 16 CH47F Chinook helicopters, or the development of the UAV platforms can be used either by Special Forces or by multinational military missions (MINISTERO DELLA DIFESA, 2017).

Defence expenditures.....

New challenges emerging after 1989 and 2001 led to changes in NATO policies and military reforms in member states. In Italy one of the first steps was the introduction of professional armed forces by the abolition of conscription in 2004 (LEGGE, 2014). Decision-makers in Italian defence sector realized that reforms are necessary in order to tackle emerging external threats. The implementation of a more definite foreign and security policy was hindered by the fact that due to the effects of economic downturn, defence expenditures have been declining since 2005 (GASPARINI; MARTA, 2008). The lack of a sound strategic framework and of political will necessary to carry out structural reforms set back the planning and the implementation of military reform; however, the economic and financial crisis of 2008 had such a disastrous effect on Italian budget that military reforms became indispensable.

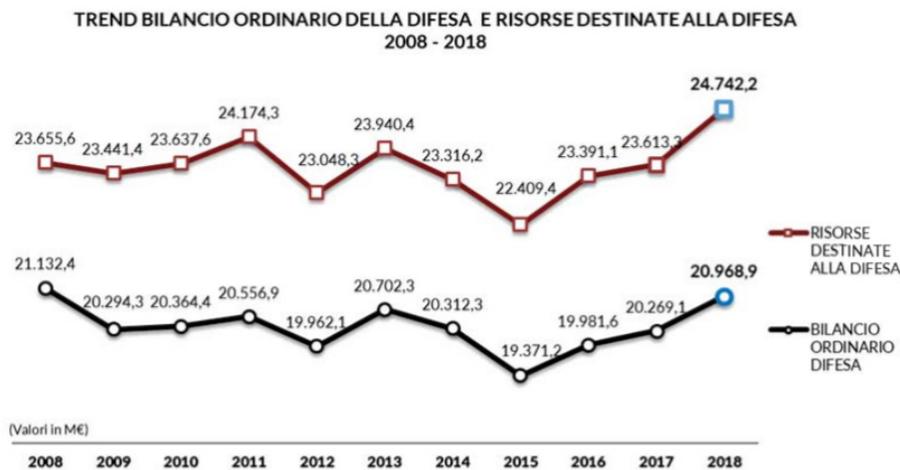
After the crisis of 2011 the Monti administration started the reform of defence budget and the preparation of military reform as part of a general budget reform. In 2012 Giampaolo Di Paola Defence Minister – with the support of the Prime Minister and the political parties supporting the government – started to review armed forces, aiming not only at mili-

tary budget cuts, but even at restructuration and downsizing⁵. According to the reform, savings should be recycled into the defence budget (MARRONE, 2012).

When analysing defence budget allocations we must take into consideration that allocations were calculated on the basis of the Finance Act of 2017 which was approved in December 2016, so allocations and actual expenditure items can sometimes diverge.

DPP is supposed to provide information about the approximate defence allocations for the coming years. However, it is already known that severe interventions and fiscal efforts are to be carried out regarding the 2019 budget, meaning that previsions of next years' defence expenditures will change significantly. We have to take into consideration that defence funds come from multiple sources, as we can see in the case of the integrated defence budget, which means that more variables can change the final budget. As a consequence of the above-mentioned reasons it is hard to determine the exact defence budget of Italy. Data provided by the Ministry of Defence is often not calculated according to the approved NATO methodology.

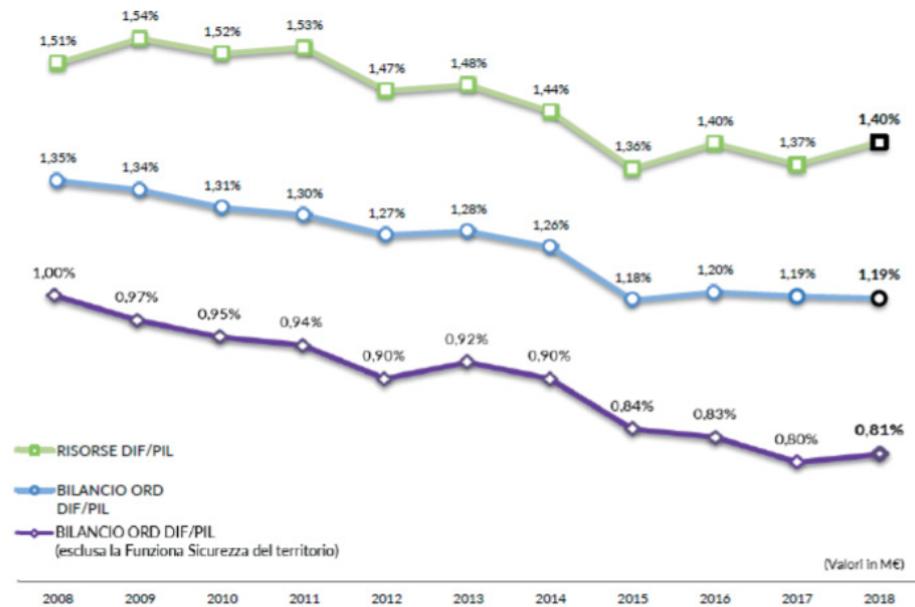
Defence expenditures are decreasing: according to the current DPP defence expenditures account for 1.19 percent of the GDP in 2017 (20 269.1 million euros), 1.19 percent in 2018 (20 968.9 million euros), while short-term projections are the following: 1.15 percent in 2019 (21 017. million euros) and 1.1 percent in 2020 (20 646.1 million euros) (MINISTERO DELLA DIFESA, 2018). In the past decade, starting from the outbreak of the economic crisis in 2008 defence budget decreased by 4.1 percent at current value which can be considered a severe backdrop.



Trends: Ordinary defence budget vs. defence budget comprising all funds 2008-2018 (black: ordinary defence budget; red: defence budget comprising all funds)
Source: Documento Programmatico Pluriennale 2018-2020, pp. 94.

5. The reform maximized the number of armed forces in 150.000 person instead of the 2012's 183.000. The number of civilians employed by Italian armed forces will decrease from 30.000 to 20.000. The 43.000 person redundancies need to be carry out gradually by 2024.

RAPPORTO SPESE PER LA DIFESA/PIL 2008-2018

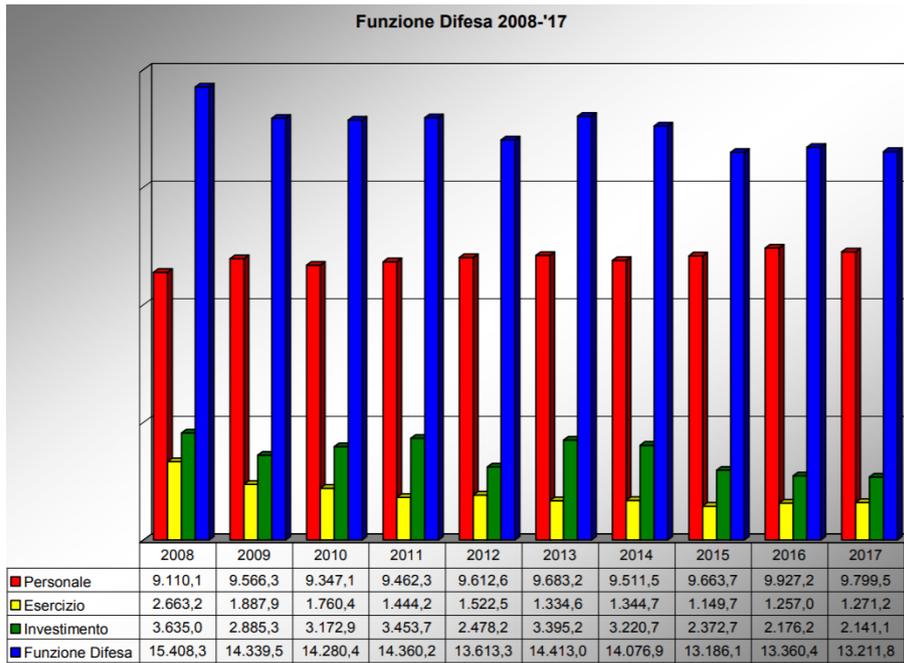


Defence expenditures/GDP 2008-2018 (green: defence budget comprising all funds; blue: ordinary defence budget; purple: ordinary defence budget excluding 'territorial security costs')
 Source: Documento Programmatico Pluriennale 2018-2020, pp. 94.

From this study’s point of view, the most relevant items are the ones allocated to tasks emerging in the traditional defence area. These are divided into personnel expenses – comprising the allowance of professional soldiers and civil employees of the army -; operating costs (*esercizio*) guaranteeing the operability and efficiency of armed forces; and investment costs. This sector suffered a 2.2 billion euros decrease since 2008. The level of traditional defence expenditures stabilised around 13 billion euros, and a further decrease is hard to carry out. The 2.2 billion euros decrease is aggravated by the changes in the real purchasing power of euro: if we calculate at 2008 rates, defence expenditures shrank by 3.9 billion euros.

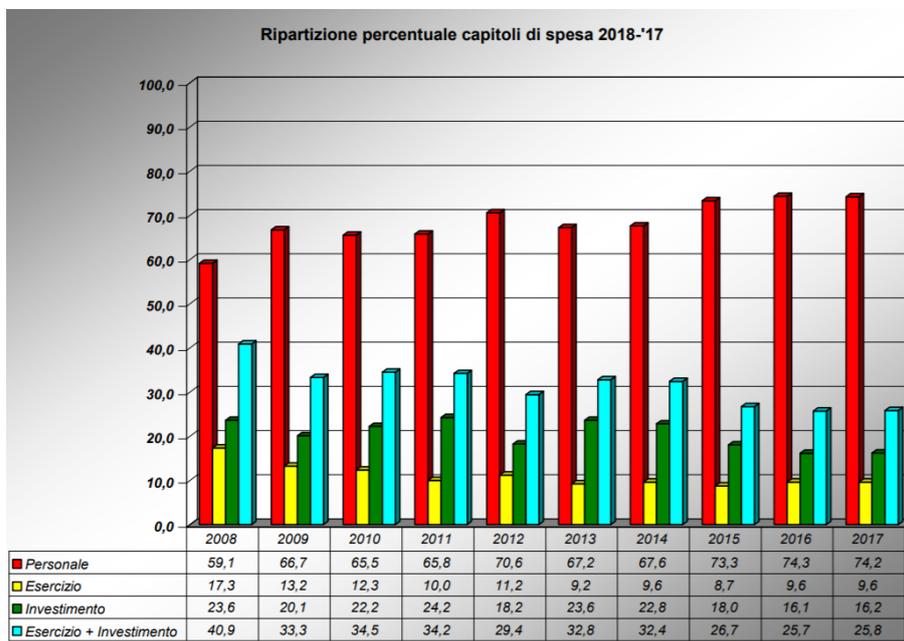
This area is particularly important since these contradictory trends can hardly guarantee the adequate development and maintenance of armed forces. While classic defence expenditures are constantly shrinking, the comparable ratio within cost groups is distorting: operating and investment costs are decreasing, but personnel expenses are in a constant increase. The classic proportion of the three cost groups (personnel – operating costs – investment costs) should be 50–25–25 percent, however, in spite of the redundancies of the last 20 years, personnel costs have risen, as the graph shows below, in 2017 74 percent of classic defence expenditures were allocated to personnel expenses. Personnel expenditures are growing further: in 2018 more than 10 billion euros are allocated to cover personnel costs (MINISTERO DELLA DIFESA, 2018).

Investment costs are still higher than operating costs, probably because defence industry is interested more in carrying out new projects rather than maintenance projects. This means that equipment, materials and infrastructure are getting older and outdated since maintenance expenditures are lacking (DE PAOLIS, 2018).



Cost groups within the classic defence expenditures from 2008 to 2017

Source: Martinelli, Giovanni (2007): Il bilancio della Difesa, [www.analisidifesa.it](https://www.analisidifesa.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/bildif17.pdf), downloaded: 06/10/2018



Cost groups within the classic defence expenditures from 2008 to 2017

Source: Martinelli, Giovanni (2007): Il bilancio della Difesa, [www.analisidifesa.it](https://www.analisidifesa.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/bildif17.pdf), downloaded: 06/10/2018

Given that operating costs cover the expenses allocated to guarantee the efficient and effective operation of armed forces (e.g. maintenance costs) the 52 percent decrease between 2008 and 2017 is alarming. While analysing operation costs, we must take into consideration the challenges posed by the ageing military infrastructure.

One of the primary goals of the restructuration and redundancies of the 2012 reform was to increase the efficiency of armed forces, which implies the quantitative and qualitative review and examination of the current infrastructure park. As a consequence of the lack of financial resources Italian armed forces are constrained to reduce the number of strategic objects, where the majority of resources are concentrated. This process can have counter-productive effects even in the short run on the Italian running of JFC headquarters in Naples or on the desired leading role in the Mediterranean region.

6. Ministero della Difesa

7. Insufficient investment resources in the financial years of 2014, 2015, 2016 did not allow the launch of new programmes.

8. *Ministero dello Sviluppo Economico*

Although investments provided by Ministry of Defence⁶ (MinDife) show a decreasing trend, new renovation and modernization projects started from 2017.⁷ This allowed the launch of new programmes or the completion of multiannual projects to fulfil international commitments, meanwhile the launch of high priority projects aimed at tackling critical shortages became possible as well. It needs to be highlighted that these programmes and projects are financed by Ministry of Economic Development⁸ (MisE), not by MinDife.

The gravest problem of Italian defence expenditure is not its constant reduction, but its structure: the decrease is often inconsiderate and difficult to systematize, hindering the achievement of targets. Whilst personnel expenses have been growing constantly in spite of redundancies, investment and operating costs have diminished. One of the most important goals of the defence budget reforms was to reorganize the structure of the expenditures. However, the reforms could not be completed due to the unstable political situation of the country and the frequent changes in government. It is evident that the current defence expenditures can hardly guarantee the maintenance, the modernization and the efficient development of the Armed Forces.

Referring to the otherwise well-functioning Italian defence industry we have to consider the spill-over effects of the economic downturn, since the crisis hit hard the top importer countries of Italian defence products. This led to the reduction of defence budget among others in France, Poland or Greece, adversely affecting Italian defence industry and aggravating the above-mentioned problems.

Security- and defence policy is supposed to support foreign policy goals, especially when security aspects of foreign policy – as it can be seen in the Mediterranean region – are gaining priority status, but current trends of Italian defence expenditures do not indicate this. With inadequate defence expenditures Italian armed forces will not be able to handle the new threats emerging in the Mediterranean regions, although Italy aims at taking a leading role in the stabilization of Libya, acknowledged by other powers, such as the U.S. or the old rival France. In the absence of a stable, consistent and adequately funded security and defence policy, Italian foreign policy will not be able to take up the lead in the region, in spite of the growing number of its military and civil missions in Africa. In other words, the implementation of an effective foreign policy in the Mediterranean region is hindered by the fact that Italian security and defence policy is underfinanced, since armed forces do not possess every equipment and capabilities necessary to support foreign policy.

Italian participation in international missions

In the past decades Italy tried to balance its relatively low, decreasing defence expenditures by actively participating in international missions in the most important conflict zones.

After the Cold War Italian diplomacy realized that contributing to collective security by actively participating in international missions has become a precondition of Italy's own security. Italian foreign policy used the military instrument to increase the country's international visibility by becoming 'security provider' (COTICCHIA, 2017).

The number of Italian soldiers deployed in international missions decreased as the economic crisis hit the country: while in 2005 the number of deployed soldiers reached 11 000, after 2008 this number constantly declined in spite of the high level of ambition (12 000 pp). In 2008 Italian armed forces participated in 25 different missions, but only with 8000 persons (RONZITTI; RUFFA, 2014). The majority (85 percent) of these troops were deployed in the three most important regions for Italian national interests and security: Lebanon, Afghanistan and Western Balkan, so we can affirm that it concentrated in the crisis zones affecting the country's broadly defined security.

The high number of deployed Italian soldiers was meant to compensate the country's moderate foreign political activity and the scarce defence funding. For Italy it will be a decisive question: how can this middle power with its limited defence expenditures and military capacities – compared to its economic potential – and with its often unstable internal policy carry out a dominant foreign policy? As a consequence of its continuous economic problems and the financial and political crises of 2011, its participation in international missions declined significantly. However, apart from the 2000 Italian soldiers deployed to Libya the number of Italian participants in other international missions decreased to 6500 persons by 2012, while Italy's goal is still to be present in the above-mentioned regions (MISSIONI... ano). For several years there have been more soldiers deployed to national territory than to international missions: by the end of 2018 there are about 6000 Italian soldiers deployed in international missions, while more than 7000 serve in missions in Italian territory (MINISTERO DELLA DIFESA, 2019a). Regarding missions in Italian territory, we have to highlight the fact that the biggest national mission – Operation Strade Sicure – can be directly connected to migration, since it is used as a crime prevention tool in metropolitan and densely populated areas (MINISTERO DELLA DIFESA, 2019b), when crimes committed by migrants residing legally or illegally in Italy are more and more often on the front pages of newspapers.

On the whole the strategic directions of Italian security and defence policy are clearly reflected by its participation in multilateral (UN, NATO, EU) and bilateral military missions. Correspondingly to the country's geographic position, beside the 'traditional' Euro-Atlantic orientation, the Mediterranean region, the Balkans and Africa can be considered the centres of Italian foreign policy. As the map shows the majority of the missions takes place in the countries at the shores of the Mediterranean-Sea, and in African states important for migration through the Mediterranean Sea. The relevance of the Mediterranean region and Afri-

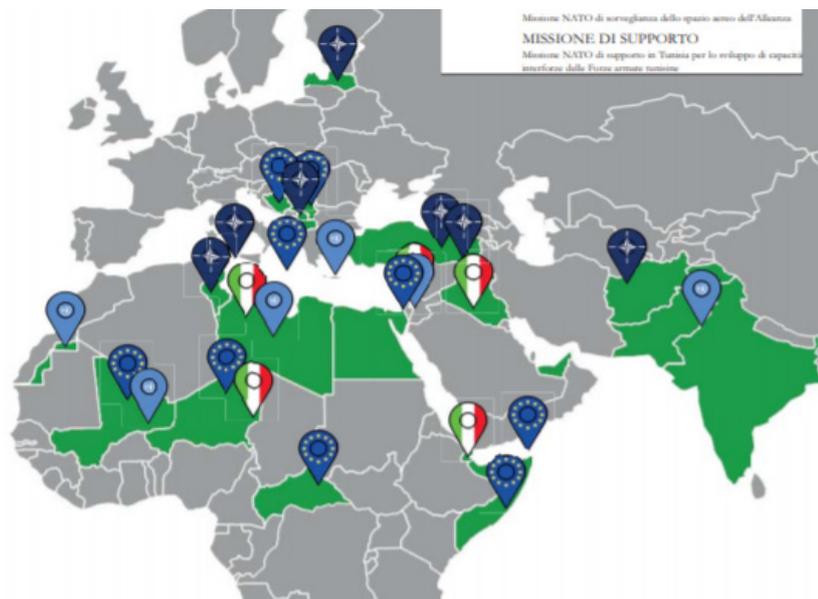
ca has been increased by the migration and refugee crises after the Arab Spring, the fragile states of the region, religious terrorism and by the consolidation of organized crime groups. If we compare Italian military missions of the 2017-2019 DPP with the ones of the 2018-2020 DPP (see below) the number of military missions in African countries is growing, even though the largest missions with Italian participation continue to be the ones in Lebanon and in Iraq (MINISTERO DELLA DIFESA, 2019a).

Military missions with Italian participation 2017-2019



Source: Documento Programmatico Pluriennale 2017-2019, pp. 12.

Military missions with Italian participation 2018-2019



Source: Documento Programmatico Pluriennale 2018-2020, pp. 22.

The Gentiloni administration decided to strengthen Italian presence in Libya and Tunisia, and expressed its will to deploy a 400-person troop to support the government of Niger. However, due to the local government and probably due to the reluctance of France – which plays a decisive role in that region – the launch of the mission was delayed until late 2018. France is playing a more relevant role in Libya as well, but it disagrees with the migration policy of the Conte government, and criticizes Italian decision not to support *European Intervention Initiative* launched by French President Emmanuel Macron. Finally, the mission received green light in September 2018. Italian Defence Minister Elisabetta Trenta claimed it as an important step to tackle migration flows (MIGRANTI..., 2018). It shows that in spite of rhetorical differences, the Conte government often backs the previous governments’ foreign and security policy initiatives.

At the same time, multilateral solutions seem to be in a difficult position: even though EUNAVFOR MED is still functioning, but its mandate -which would have expired at 31st December 2018 was extended only for a three-month period, until 31 March 2019 (COUNCIL DECISION, 2018). The harder approach of the Conte government does not ease the EU’s efforts: Vice-Minister Matteo Salvini threatened that Italy would not participate in the mission, if participating ships take migrants mostly to Italian ports (UE..., 2018)⁹, demanding the distribution of migrants within member states. These three months are considered to be an extra time to find compromise within member states, since the mission’s mandate can only be modified by unanimous vote. However as European Parliament elections are getting closer, it will be more difficult to find an acceptable solution for every national government, since a general anti-migration attitude can be observed within member states.

9. According to the mandate of EUNAVFOR MED rescued migrants should be taken to the nearest port available, which is mainly Italy due to its geographical vicinity to Libya.

While multilateral relations seem to be neglected by the Conte administration, Italo-Libyan bilateral relations started to intensify: after the Palermo Summit about Libya, in December 2018 Khalifa Haftar was received in Rome, then Prime Minister Conte had bilateral meetings with the most important leaders of Libya (Prime Minister Serraj, Khalifa Haftar, Khaled Al Meshri President of the Higher Council of the State of Libya, Agila Saleh, President of the Libyan House of Representatives) during his trip to Libya (CONTE..., 2018).

Conclusion

Even though Italy managed to be an important actor in European affairs, its status as major power was several times called into question. Italy has the eighth biggest economy on the world, the third GDP in the Eurozone, but it can be defined only as a weakening middle power. Due to its geographic position it tries to exert its influence on the close and important regions: Western Balkans, North-Africa and Middle East. From 2018 the Eurosceptic Conte administration tries to carry out a more confrontational foreign and security policy in order to represent national interests more radically, while multilateral relations tend to be neglected, bilateralism has become once again more central, as we can see in the case of Libya. In the current moment, the decline of multilateralism seems to

weaken the European dimension of the Conte administration, bilateral negotiations are considered to be a safer and faster way of safeguarding national interests, Italy has entered into more open and sharp conflicts with European institutions, as was seen in the case of EUNAVFOR MED. However, due to some geopolitical realities several changes in foreign policy can be observed only in the rhetoric. The Conte administration is composed by populist, extremist movements, some measures taken by the government are different from the previous governments' steps but Euro-Atlantic and Euro-Mediterranean regions will probably continue to be in the centre of Italian foreign and security policy.

As a consequence of Italian armed forces' low level of ambition and budget problems it is logical that the country concentrates its power and capacities to the region of "Mare Nostrum", but it necessitates safe and rational management of the limited budget. We find that Italy participates in too many international missions compared to its real capacities, even though the number of missions has declined in the last few years. With this active participation Italy would like to increase its international visibility, compensating the fact that it is not a member of the nuclear club. Not a quantitative, but a qualitative shift is necessary to achieve this goal.

The implementation and completion of the restructuration of armed forces – started by previous administrations – has to be carried out by a new political actor that generally criticizes the decisions of its predecessor. It remains to be seen whether the M5S-Lega coalition evaluates the reform of armed forces as a result of a multi-party agreement and continues to implement the measures of the 2015 White Book or withdraws from it. The latter would further delay the imperative modernization of Italian armed forces. Regardless of whether the new coalition carries out the reforms of the White Book or outlines new directions for the armed forces, it is clear that the current trends of defence spending do not support the implementation of an effective foreign policy, quantitative and qualitative changes would be necessary so that the aspired Mediterranean middle power role could be filled either from the foreign policy or from security and defence policy point of views.

As we demonstrated in our study even though the strategic directions have been stable since the beginning of the nineties, however, we must take into consideration regarding either foreign or security and defence policy, that not only the international political situation changes often, but Italian internal policy is unstable as well, having an effect on its defence sector and on the desired Italian leading role in the Mediterranean region. Parliamentary elections in 2018 resulted in a complex internal political situation, the new M5S-Lega coalition has to redefine Italy's role in the international community, but the operational dynamic of the coalition could slow down this process. Both parties have a strong anti-EU rhetoric which could change common security and defence policy as well, in case one of the main supporters of deepening defence integration backs out from this part of the European integration. Even though the 2018-2020 DPP recognizes the importance of CSDP based on the allocation of funds, it seems to be only a mostly theoretical support.

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