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## **Ideas of Europe in Italian political discourse**

### **Background and Introduction**

The aim of this paper is to provide an overview of ideas of Europe in Italian political discourse following the fall of the Berlin wall which had a decisive impact on the Italian domestic policy, departing from political discourse as shown in the governmental, parliamentary stances, opinion polls, news items, speeches, interviews and reports. This research concentrates on the post Maastricht Treaty period because the European integration has had an increasing impact on domestic politics and on the national party system since the 1990s (Mair, 2000), and the transformation of the Italian party system between 1992 and 1994 makes this period much more interesting for our research. This investigation focuses on the social and governmental support of the EU (internal debate on accession and on membership), analyses the public opinion about the membership of Italy, and the opinion of the governments and political parties about the institutional reform of the European Union based on primary and secondary sources.

Italy, being one of the most Euro-enthusiastic member state, supported the deepening of European integration all through the 20th century, nevertheless an active, and from the aspect of the integration also decisive foreign policy was only realised in the decades following WW 2, by the Christian-democratic P.M., Alcide De Gasperi. After this period, the Italian EU policy can only be labelled as 'follower and/or supporter' and not decisive. (Horváth, 2000) Governments in Italy have frequently changed one-another, probably due to the proportionate election system and the exaggerated weight of the Parliament. (Pankovits, 1998)

The short-term governmental operations never made it possible for the Italian foreign policy to play a determinatively active role like France or Germany in preparing and concluding decisions aiming at deepening the integration process. Italy, one of the biggest states of the EU – considering both the number of the population and her economic power – , even despite her 'follower' policy, has always remained one of the most important pillars in the integration process. The various governments have consistently facilitated each and every decision targeted at the deepening of the integration. It is worth mention that the initiatives of Italian politicians in the 80s, which contributed to pushing the process of integration from the standstill. One of such initiatives was the so-called Genscher-Colombo Plan, the other one was the "*draft Treaty on the establishment of the European Union*", created on the initiative of Altiero Spinelli.

In the post-war era the centre-right parties were devoted supporters of the integration. At the end of the 40s and in the 50s, the Christian Democrats wanted to strengthen the role of Western Europe in the changed international environment building on the common Christian roots. De Gasperi claimed with deep conviction that Italy can be much more successful in representing her interest within the framework of European co-operation. (Pistone, 1982, pp. 195-197)

The Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), for a long time working in opposition, shared the objectives of the Soviet foreign policy, and so they did not support the development of the integration. As after 1947, the left-wing parties could not take part in Italian governments, they considered Euro-Atlantic integration to be the most apparent sign of US dominance and the expression of Western capitalism. The Socialist Party ceased to follow its consistent anti-integration policy and the unconditional support of the foreign policy of the USSR after the Hungarian revolution of 1956. The Communist Party had started to express its more positive opinion towards the European integration following 1962, and acted the same way after the failure of the 'Prague Spring' in 1968. Beginning from the late 1960s, Italian left-wing parties also became active agents in the deepening of the integration. Altiero Spinelli, who was a candidate on the list of the Communist Party, though he became an independent European MP, was one of the most powerful supporters of Euro-federalism and the direct election of the European Parliament.

In spite of the strong pro-European public opinion, eurosceptic attitude has surfaced among the new centre-right political parties originating from the remarkable transformation of the domestic party system, and issues regarding the European integration have become more problematic than before. (Quaglia, 2003)

### **The attitude of Italian political parties**

Up to 1990, European-level policy-making had not turned into the field of combat between bigger conflicting coalitions, mainly due to the lack of the alternation of different political courses and due to bipartisan EU-policy since the 1970s. It was only after the collapse of the Eastern Block, the actions of 'mani pulite' and the electoral reform that the two large opposing coalitions took shape. Due to the modifications of the 1993 Election Bill, a 4% electoral threshold was introduced at the Parliamentary elections, and the majority principle was partially applied. The introduction of the majority principle in the election system contributed to the formation of party coalitions more efficient in securing a more stable governmental operation, thus creating the basis for the alternation of political courses. The events taking place in Italy during the early 1990s were considered by many as a kind of 'transformation' which marked the end of the 'First Republic' and the birth of the highly promising 'Second Republic'.

Although the collapse (1989-1991) of the Eastern Block served as the fundament of changes, but the real political avalanche was launched by the corruption scandal that broke out around the Italian Socialist Party, which soon reached several elements of the political scene. In the case of Italy, however, is not possible to speak about the birth of the new Republic in the traditional political or constitutional sense, as this process was not due to the elaboration and approval of a novel constitution, but rather to a political landslide mainly concerning parties, the political elite and the party system. Simultaneously with the political landslide, the smaller parties almost totally disappeared while the bigger ones transformed to a large extent, with their support dropping. This remarkable transformation of the political and party system was connected to the renewal of the political elite and helped the creation of the bipolar party-system.

All of the main political parties have expressed a pro-European approach since the 1970s, but during the post Maastricht Treaty period different level of Euroscepticism emerged.

On the left the major successors of the PCI (Italian Communist Party), the PDS (Democratic Party of the Left, 1991-1998), later transformed into DS (Democrats of the Left) (1998-2009) emphasised, concentrating on welfare and social issues, the social democratic aspects and supranational federalist vision of the integration. The PDS/DS, a founder of the Party of European Socialists (PES), expressed this opinion during the electoral campaign of the 1999 EP elections with its political slogan: 'yes to a market economy, no to a market society'. The Party for Communist Refoundation (PRC), smaller of the two successor parties to the PCI, represented a different model of the integration, and it expressed its critical opinion about the deepening of the integration and the institutional reform, voting against the Maastricht Treaty and later the European Constitutional Treaty, and expressed their criticism about the wider competencies of the EU. The PRC missed the articulation of some basic principles, like the ban of all wars and the creation of a full-employment economy. (Bardi, 2007, pp. 6-7; Conti, 2003, p. 25)

The other main pro-European centre-left party, the PSI became one of the main loser of the party system crisis due to the actions of the so called 'Mani Puliti'. The most important successor of the PSI was the SDI (Italian Democratic Socialists), which maintained the pro-European, federalist attitude of its predecessor.

The left and liberal Radical Party was also pro-European, and in its 2004 statute stated the necessity to strengthen 'the liberal, liberist, and libertarian struggle for liberal revolution and for the United States of Europe'. The party supported the federal development of the integration based on the principle of subsidiarity in order to make decisions closer to the people. The 2000 statute of the Greens expressed a similar, pro-European opinion: 'The Greens are those who work for the political unity of a Europe based on the principles of democratic federalism and subsidiarity.' They represents that the environment is a key issue for the creation of the political unification of the Union. (Bardi, 2007, p. 7)

The centre-left parties (e.g. DS, PPI) have been the most devoted supporters of the deepening of the European integration with the aim of creating a supranational, federal union, highlighting the importance of a common European identity since the 90s.

Following the collapse of the Italian party system the Italian Christian Democracy (DC) was divided into two different political directions. The right wing of the DC created the CCD (Christian Democratic Centre) and the CDU (United Christian Democrats, later became the UDC, Union of Christian and Centre Democrats). The successors of the DC were all pro-European and favourable to the deepening of the European integration. The left wing of the DC founded the Italian Peoples Party (PPI). The PPI later played an important role in the creation of the centre-left Margherita.

In 1993, leaving a political vacuum behind, the Italian Christian democracy finally dissolved, and the voter support of the successor parties also significantly decreased. Consequently, the vacuum in the internal politics was filled suddenly by a new type of political parties. On the right side of the political palette during the 90s there were three new parties that attracted most the voters with a right-wing orientation: Forza Italia (FI), National Alliance (Alleanza Nazionale - AN) and the Northern League. This process naturally did not occur without any precedents as the routes of the Northern League can be traced back already to the 80s. At the same time, the National Alliance grew out of the Italian Social Movement

(MSI, Movimento Sociale Italiano). In 1993 a new party emerged to oppose the centre-left coalition: Forza Italia. This party was indeed constituted a totally new, unprecedented political construct. The huge vacuum in the right-wing was finally filled by the media magnate Silvio Berlusconi.

In spite of the strong pro-European public opinion, both soft and hard eurosceptic approaches appeared among the new centre-right political parties. Already during the first (1994), but manifestly during the second (and third, 2001) and fourth (2008) Berlusconi governments, eurosceptic approaches surfaced on governmental level. (Quaglia, 2003) It must be emphasized that the different parties of the centre right coalition (House of Freedom) represented different levels of euroscepticism.

A division can be mentioned between soft and hard euroscepticism. Soft euroscepticism includes for example viewpoints against one of the policies of the EU. Those who express revulsion against the political or economic 'deepening' of the EU (e.g. objection against the introduction of the Euro) are also counted among 'soft sceptics'. In short, those who belong to the soft wing of eurosceptics are not against the European integration, but have differing opinions about particular measures. They attach primary importance to the vindication of national interests. In contrast, the representatives of the hard euroscepticism are totally against the political and economic integration, and they stand up against the EU membership of their own country. (Taggart - Szczerbiak, 2001, p. 8) They generally express criticism against capitalism, liberalism and socialism considering these as power tools of the EU.

Forza Italia's attitude regarding the EU was very fluid because of its wide range of social background and its rather vague ideological platform, mainly based on the Thatcherian principle of liberal market economy. This attitude emphasised the defence of Italian national interests. As Lucia Quaglia in 2001 underlined 'the position of its leaders on EU issues is still unclear.' (Quaglia, 2003) As an appearance of the soft euroscepticism of Forza Italia we can mention the suggestion by Silvio Berlusconi to re-negotiate the Treaty on European Union (in 1997) in order to join the EMU without fulfilling the convergence criteria, the decision of the Berlusconi government not to participate in the project of the Airbus A400M military transport aircraft (2001) and soft eurosceptic statements of the government's politicians like Tremonti or Martino. These eurosceptic elements can also be considered the manifestation of latent euroscepticism in Italy. (Quaglia, 2003, pp. 17-20) Bardi Luciano expressed a similar opinion on Forza Italia: 'Forza Italia is one of the most ambivalent Italian parties with regard to attitudes towards the EU. Documents and manifestoes concerning EP elections are imbued with all the classic elements of pro-European rhetoric. In other documents and positions, however, the party's attitude is more detached and less enthusiastic, especially if compared with that of Italian Catholic and moderate left parties. FI's hesitations are particularly visible on issues having implications for domestic fiscal and budgetary policies, and also on foreign policy and security questions, probably in view of the party's preference for a stronger and closer relationship with the United States.' (Bardi, 2007, p. 10) As Conti argues 'European integration is not at the centre of the ideology of FI, where the market is, instead, the focus'. (Conti 2003, 26.p.) Forza Italia joined the European Peoples' Party in 1999. This fact largely contributed to the party gaining political power.

In 1995 the National Alliance (AN) replaced the nationalist and post-fascist Italian Social Movement (MSI). The extreme wing of the MSI created the new party, the MSI-Tricolour Flame, which represented a soft eurosceptic attitude, and the idea of a 'Europe of nations'.

The AN maintaining an intergovernmental approach, had a more pro-European attitude than its predecessor, the MSI, in order to realise the political rehabilitation of the party. From the beginning Gianfranco Fini's main aim was to lead the party close to the political centre, creating a new centre-right Gaullist party. The Statute (1995, Fiuggi) emphasised the '*Europe des patries of de Gaulle*'. At the conference of Verona (1998) the final document still proposed the reduction of the weight of the national government by increasing the power of the European Parliament'. (Bardi, 2007, p. 7) Minister for Telecommunications of the second Berlusconi government, Maurizio Gasparri, emphasised that 'on the one hand there has to be a greater political and democratic legitimisation of the [EU] institutions; on the other hand, there has to be a more balanced vindication of national interests' (Secolo d'Italia, 20 December 2001, Quaglia, 2003, pp. 13-14).

In the second Berlusconi government the party did not represent either soft or hard euroscepticism. (Quaglia, 2003, pp. 13-18) The new statute approved in 2006, however did not even mention the European integration. (Statute of Alleanza Nazionale, 2007) According to Conti a certain cost-benefit analysis characterized the attitude regarding EU issues of FI and AN, and the even deeper European integration was not a goal for itself, but for the benefits to national interests. (Conti, 2003, p. 26)

The right-wing or rather neo-populist Northern League was officially founded in 1991 as a federation of leagues from different northern regions. The party won its first important success in the 1983 elections, when in the region the 4.3% of the votes went to the party. In the second half of the '80, however, the centre of the different regional leagues moved over to Lombardy, and their leader Umberto Bossi received a seat in Senate in 1987. Bossi who recognised the limitation of the ethno-regionalism created the Northern League. The case of this regionalist party is interesting because the LN changed its position regarding the European integration from a pro-European to a eurosceptic standpoint. The Lombard League, the predecessor of the Northern League, often referred in its political ideology to the European Integration Process. Already in the 1980s they envisioned the token of the independence of Lombardy in a Europe organised on federative basis. The basis of legitimating their anti-constitutional, secessionist intentions was provided by the just deepening European Integration. Nevertheless, they conceptualised Europe as a confederation of regions with the broadest possible competencies. They considered the Integration as an alternative to national identity. They did not support the development of an integration based on nation-states, centrally governed from Brussels. (Diamanti, 1993, p. 161)

Umberto Bossi, in his book 'Wind of the North', wrote about the birth of regional states, the formation of 'Europe of the regions' as the Europe of the peoples. Obviously the constantly growing competence of the Brussels bureaucracy did not fit into this picture. The goal of this party was to create 'the federal Europe of regions' based on the inter-regional (not inter-governmental) principle. (Bossi – Vimercati, 1992) Umberto Bossi envisaged the role of Brussels as threatening with the danger of a 'new Rome'.

Nevertheless, in 1993 the League voted in favour of the ratification of the TEU as they considered the establishment of the Committee of the Regions a major step which could lead towards the transformation of the EP on a federative basis and in a two-chamber form, since, according to their plans the upper chamber of the European Parliament would fulfil the task of representation of the sub-national regions. (Diamanti, 1993, p. 166)

During the time of the first Berlusconi government in 1994, the Northern League proclaimed to represent a strong pro-European approach, without any eurosceptic attitude. The LN represented the stance that Italy had to fulfil the convergence criteria in order to enter the Single Currency Zone. Umberto Bossi, the leader of the LN wrote a letter to the European Commission asking about the possibility for Padania to join EMU. (Quaglia, 2003. p. 15; Giordano, 2004).

The Northern League, on their Milan Congress in 1997 officially accepted the party's strategy whose motto suited the previous views of the NL concerning the integration: 'free Padania in a free Europe'. Their goal was to achieve a 'federation based on the cooperation of independent 'small nations''. In this period the NL built their strategy on the fact that Italy was not expected to become member of the EMU. According to their expectations this would have strengthened the secessionist inclination in the people of the Northern regions and the formation of a unified Northern identity. (Luverà, 1997, p. 88)

The Northern League's eurosceptic stance appeared following Italy's official qualification to join the EMU. After joining the EMU at the millennium the popular support for the NL decreased significantly. At the same time, Umberto Bossi began to declare increasingly eurosceptic views.

In 2000, at the Pontida meeting of the NL, Umberto Bossi claimed that the EU did not only threaten only nation states, but also small nations. He expressed his view that emphasising the principle of subsidiarity was only necessary in order to mislead people, as it was only useful for concentrating power at the community level. (Bossi, 2000) According to Umberto Bossi the European left wing was striving to create a super-state similar to the Soviet Union. (Bossi, 2001) All over Europe there was a surge of indignation following that Bossi's naming the EU 'the USSR of the West' and a 'Stalinist superstate'. (Bossi, 2002)

Although the Italian government had a traditional pro-Turkish approach, the Northern League stood against the opening of accession process with Turkey because of its Muslim traditions and its number of population, and the accession process was supported by the main Italian parties as well. In the Italian society there was no widespread debate on the question of the Turkish accession. (EU-25 WATCH No. 2. pp. 127-128)

Following the general elections of 2006, The LN in opposition represented a soft eurosceptic attitude. In general they emphasised that the Euro was the cause of the crisis of Northern Italy's small industries.

By 2007 it became clear that the Italian political processes in the short term would result in the formation of a bipolar party system. One of the major signs of this process was that beginning from 2007, the process of fusions between parties accelerated at both sides of the Italian political palette. Despite the conflicts between parties close to one-another in the ideological respect, during the following two years two mass parties, People of Freedom and the Democratic Party were brought to life.

The centre-left Democratic Party was established in October 2007, under the leadership of Walter Veltroni, following the dissolution of the Democrats of the Left (DS) and the Margherita, as the successor of the Olive-tree Coalition. Veltroni, reacting to the political tensions in Italy, grouped the political goals of the party around four main topics (environment, agreement between generations, training and security.) The definition of the position of this new political agent among the European political parties, however, proved to

be very difficult, and inspired debates among politicians, as it embraced politicians both from the left wing and from the Christian Democrats. In the Party's Manifest it was stated that 'The process of the European unification is still restrained by the strong resistance of nationalistic egoism, which the Democratic Party intends to withstand in order to realise a complete political and democratic integration. (Partito Democratico, 2008)

The creation of the new centre-right mass party, the People of Freedom was prepared by Silvio Berlusconi in 2007, and than officially finalised during a party congress on 27–29 March 2009 with the fusion of Forza Italia and the National Alliance. The new party still has a wide social background and a rather vague ideological platform.

As emphasised in the 'Charter of Values' (Popolo della Libertá, 2009) of the People of Freedom, the major ideological issues and goals of the party were its 'Christian' and 'liberal' character, the defence of traditional values as well as of individual responsibility and self-determination, the adherence of the party to the values and the platform of the European People's Party (EPP) and its support for European integration

Analysing Italian political parties Conti and Verzichelli defined five different types of attitude towards the European integration. According to their classification the centre-left parties (PPI, DS, and later the PD) represent identity Europeanism, the extreme left (RC) hard euroscepticism, centre-right parties (FI, AN) functional Europeanism and soft euroscepticism, and the Extreme right (LN) functional Europeanism and floating between soft and hard euroscepticism, (Conti, 2003) as seen in detail in the table below:

Party attitudes to European integration	Details
Hard euroscepticism	<p>There is a principled opposition to the EU and European integration. It can be seen in parties who think that their countries should withdraw from membership, or whose policies towards the EU oppose the whole project of European integration as it is currently conceived.</p> <p>There is no commitment to reform but to change radically the current trajectory of European integration.</p>
Soft euroscepticism	<p>There is not a principled objection to European integration or EU membership but concern on one (or a number) of policy areas lead to the expression of qualified opposition to the EU.</p> <p>Or there is a sense that 'national interest' is currently at odds with the</p>

	<p>EU trajectory.</p> <p>The party has a will to reform Europe.</p>
No commitment/No mention	<p>No clear attitude to European integration.</p> <p>Policy-specific preferences may be expressed but it is overall impossible to define the broad party attitude.</p>
Functional Europeanism	<p>Support to European integration can be re-conducted to a strategy, serving domestic interests or a different party goal.</p> <p>There is no commitment to further integration, unless it is proved it would serve such interests.</p> <p>Otherwise, commitment to European integration is mainly in terms of defence of the status quo.</p>
Identity Europeanism	<p>There is a principled support to the EU and European integration.</p> <p>There is claim in favour of further competence shift from the national to the supranational arena, of Federal Europe and of a European citizenship.</p> <p>Further integration is a fundamental party goal.</p>

Source: Nicolò Conti: Party Attitudes to European Integration: A Longitudinal Analysis of the Italian Case. SEI Working Paper No 70. 2003. by the Sussex European Institute. <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/documents/wp70.pdf> p. 17.

### Introducing the Euro

At the beginning of the 1990s, Italy had to face serious economic problems. In 1992, the Lira was deflated by 7% (and than 30%), so, although not permanently, only temporarily, Italy had to leave the European Monetary System. Simultaneously other macroeconomic indicators of the Italian economy (like e.g. the foreign trade balance) showed decreasing trends, while Italy's joining the European common currency also became insecure.

During the first Berlusconi government in 1994 the Foreign Minister, Antonio Martino criticised the EMU project. He emphasised that 'the convergence was neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for monetary unification'. He also considered necessary to re-negotiate the convergence criteria of the Maastricht treaty. The Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi also proposed the renegotiation of the TEU in order to Italy could join the EMU without fulfilling the convergence criteria. (Quaglia, 2003, p. 11)

However, by the middle of 1990s, following the 1996 elections, the new centre-left 'Olive tree Coalition' managed to re-stabilise the Italian economic balance. In November 1996, the

Lira re-joined the European Monetary System. The ‘Olive-tree Coalition’ considered one of their priority to fulfil the euro convergence criteria (Maastricht Criteria), the pre-requirements of joining the third stage of European Economic and Monetary Union and adopt the euro. (D’Alema, 1998; Ciampi, 2000/a, pp. 203-205) In this period, the problems of the Italian economy made it doubtful whether Italy could remain at all an important member of the European Union. The Prodi government considered their primary mission to conclude the necessary reforms. They set as their goal to eliminate economic problems and to re-establish the prestige of the political elite, to answer the euro convergence criteria, to lead Italy back into the European Monetary System, to get admitted into the Euro Zone, as well as the reform of the public sphere and political institutions. (D’Alema, 1997, p. 157) During centre left government in opposition, the Forza Italia renewed the idea of re-negotiating the TEU. (Quaglia, 2003, p. 12)

In the year 1997 in order to comply with the euro convergence criteria, without any resistance by the Italian public, they introduced a so called ‘one-time Euro tax’ to be valid only until the fulfilment of the criteria had been achieved. Owing to the successful economic policy, Italy became a member of the Monetary Integration, which the centre left government could account for as a great achievement, when it was finally decided after long debates in Brussels on May 1, 1998. To reach this stage, however, the strict Maastricht criteria had to be fulfilled, which naturally was not an easy task for Italy, as the ratio of the annual government deficit to gross domestic product (GDP) was 7.7% in 1995, and 6.6% in 1996. Nevertheless this ratio was decreased to 2.7%, as a consequence of the Euro tax and the economic restrictions. This ratio was kept in the following two years as well; in 1998 and 1999 government deficit was 2.6% to the GDP. Already by 1997, the inflation rate had also been decreased significantly, from the 1995 rate of 5.4% to the 1997 1.9 %. However, the ratio of Italy’s gross government debt could not be dropped under the Maastricht required level; as it was as high as 124.2% in 1995, 124.0% in 1996, 121.6 in 1997 and 118.5% in 1998. (Horváth, 2000, pp. 550-553) After the introduction of the Euro, analysts found that contrary to the early difficulties, participation in the European Monetary signified a serious advantage for Italy; the interest rates for example decreased at a higher speed than in other states, and as analysts claimed, the 2000 oil crisis also shook the Italian economy less strongly than it would have, were Italy to face the crisis on her own. (Vaciago, 2001, p. 208)

While after the introduction of the Euro several political fields (e.g. inflationary and monetary policies) became part of the Community Policies, several others remained under the authority of national governments (e.g. employment policy, technological development, tax policy and social policy), so national governments kept on being responsible for the reform of the latter political fields. In Italy, the execution of reforms was to a large extent made difficult by the economic problems that had cumulated during the preceding decades (e.g. the problems occurring in the Mezzogiorno, the high government debt and the relatively low R+D subsidies).

Italian politicians worried about the country’s exclusion from the important issues concerning the integration in case of staying out of the Euro Zone. As Massimo D’Alema, Italian PM in 1998 stated, close attachment to the Union brought Italy out of the ever deepening political and economic crisis of the 1990s. In his view, the maintenance of the competitiveness of the EU required the left-wing governments to conclude the reform of the social state. (D’Alema, 1998) Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, at the time President of the Italian Republic considered the introduction of the Euro as a great success, and stated that the

centre left coalition had managed to balance the country's economic state. According to the President, Italy's joining the Monetary Union also had advantages for the domestic affairs, as one of its consequences was the decrease of the threat of the country's dissolution, i.e. the secessionism supported by the Northern League. In his view, the country's population also endorsed the government so that with the introduction of the Euro the national sovereignty could be elevated to the Community level. (Ciampi, 2000/a)

Already during the time of the first Berlusconi government (1994), as well as the next, 2001 Berlusconi-led central right coalition, a drifting away from the traditional EU policy became apparent. The new government, through a more determined emphasis on national interests, stopped representing the traditional 'follower' EU policy of its predecessors. After the inauguration of the second Berlusconi government, communications concerning the Euro seemed to underpin the worries of those who had concerns about the future of the integration, when in early January 2002 the debate between some members of the government and the minister of foreign affairs concluded in the resignation of the foreign minister, Renato Ruggiero.

The debate was induced by the hostile anti-Euro declarations of defence minister Antonio Martino, Giulio Tremonti minister of economy and Umberto Bossi minister of reforms without portfolio, while Ruggiero, not assuming community with the other members of government, stood up against the declarations. The major West-European newspapers (*El Pais*, *Le Monde*, *Financial Times*, *The Times*, *Le Figaro*) interpreted the resignation of Ruggiero as signalling the weakening of the Mediterranean pillar of the EU, Italy's turning away from the Union, since Ruggiero became foreign minister exactly because of his prestige as a politician all over Europe, which was due to him having been a former president of WTO, and because of his well-known pro-integration approach.

After the resignation of the foreign minister, in order to ease the European partners' worries, Silvio Berlusconi announced in his speech in Parliament that Italy would remain a stable and solid member of the integration. In his interview given to *The Times* on January 14, 2002 stated that as a representative of Italy's interests he would support the reforms aimed at the more efficient functioning of the EU. In several of his official statements Berlusconi reinforced his intention to endorse setting up of the Convent and the enlargement of the EU. Following this statement, certain ministers also involved in the affair, among them also Umberto Bossi was forced to stand up for his own pro-integration approach. (CNNITALIA, 2002/ab) Umberto Bossi, however, was already at the time forming the second Berlusconi government opposed to Ruggiero's appointment, arguing that Ruggiero was a symbol of the past (CNNITALIA, 2001/a). On January 4, Umberto Bossi stated to *Corriere della Sera* that between him and Ruggiero there always had been conflicts because for him the foreign minister had represented the bureaucrats' despotic and tyrannical Europe. (CNNITALIA, 2001/b) An article published in the January 6 issue of *La Padania*, the official daily of the Northern League, explained Umberto Bossi's arguments with the fact that the introduction of the Euro brought very sensitive policies under the Community's authority. According to the author of the article Umberto Bossi did not intend to refute the introduction of the Euro, his aim was only to find out what consequences the introduction of the common currency could lead to, since in Bossi's opinion it would cause serious tensions if decisions would be made in Brussels and not in Rome in questions concerning the welfare state (e.g. the pension reform). (La Padania, 2002/a) As Fransco Speroni, EU MP of the Northern League did not agree with the fears of those worried about

the criticism of the common currency's to mean a threat to its facilitative role in the integration. In his opinion earlier examples like e.g. the Rouble also underpinned the argument that the use of a common currency in itself does not lead to the integration of the nations implementing the currency. (La Padania, 2002/b) Making comparisons of the Soviet Union to the EU has been rather characteristic of politicians of the Northern League. Speroni, however, did not count with the fact that Rouble had been introduced in a totally different international situation as the dictatorship of the Soviet Union could in no way be equalised with the voluntary structure of the EU. At the same time it cannot be considered an accident why Speroni chose the USSR as an example for the above mentioned trend of the Northern League.

In contrast to the previous ideas, political scientist Piero Ignazi thought that in actual fact Silvio Berlusconi forced his foreign minister to resign because Ruggiero, with his devotion to pro-integration policy, did not fit among the populist majority of the government. (Ignazi, 2002) According to the left-wing opposition Silvio Berlusconi's decision signalled the sudden breakthrough of 'Bossism' in the government. For them this was a clear sign of the government's anti-integration policy, and politicians of the opposition parties attacked Berlusconi's decision in numerous daily papers. (CNNITALIA, 2002/c) During the years following her accession to the Euro Zone, Italy was still able to maintain the macro-economic indicators required by the convergence criteria.

The Commission's interest towards the Italian budget situation, however gradually increased after December 2004, because it became known that the Italian government took up yearly more credit than reported to Brussels, which reminded Brussels of the practice of Greece. In recent years the gradually growing government deficit and the structural problems of the Italian economy have caused a steadily increasing problem. According to official data of the EU, Italy's government deficit in proportion to the GDP was 3.5% in 2003, 3.5% in 2004, 4.2% in 2005, and 4.4% in 2006. At the same time, government debt was 104.3 in 2003, 1013-8 in 2004, 106.2 in 2005, and 106.8% in 2006. (Eurostat, 2008) In 2006, Italian government deficit was the highest in the Euro Zone. Padoa-Schioppa, minister of economy still thought at the end of 2006 that the 2007 budget would give a chance for Italy for remaining below the 3% threshold. (Corriere della Sera, 2006) In April 2006, when an approximate 4% deficit in proportion to the GDP was foreseen, one of the analyses of the Financial Times even mentioned that Italy would have to leave the Euro Zone. The chance for this, however, was very low, but Italy is to execute further severe reforms to avoid this threat. (La Repubblica, 2006) In 2009 as a consequence of the global crisis, all the above listed indicators got worse, which can mean that the government debt may be as high as 110.5%, and the government deficit can reach 3.7% of the GDP. In addition to this the government has also counted with an economic decrease of 2%.

### **Enlargement and institutional reforms**

The major Italian politicians have always supported the institutional reforms targeting the rise of efficiency of the community decision-making process, as well as the clarification of power relationships among the EU institutions and the final political integration, all taking place simultaneously with the accession negotiations of the EU10. (Dini, 2000) (Ciampi, 2000/b)

Massimo D'Alema wrote in a study published in 1998 that after the introduction of the Euro and before the enlargement it would be necessary to carry out further reforms aiming to deepen the political integration. He also supported the strengthening of the role of the EP, and at the same time he thought that after the enlargement there would be less chance for finalising the political integration, which in turn could endanger the common European currency. In his view the European left-wing parties could play an important part in the execution of European reforms. According to his opinion, European liberal right-wing parties did not support establishing political integration, because novel, supra-national institutions would place obstacles in the way of economic liberalism. Nationalistic parties, on the contrary, were trying to seclude from globalism. (D'Alema, 1998) The foreign minister of the Olive-tree Coalition, Lamberto Dini, while also supporting institutional reforms, endorsed the much-debated proposal of Joschka Fischer, German foreign minister, according to which the Constitutional process should be launched before the Eastern enlargement. In Dini's view, the new EU Constitution should be elaborated jointly by the representatives of national governments, the Commission of the EU, national parliaments and the European Parliament. He supported the idea that after the enlargement only the so called 'hard core' of the member states should participate in the political union. (Dini, 2000) Carlo Azelio Ciampi, former president of the republic, also agreed with the theory that the introduction of the Euro was a milestone on the way to create the system of close political integration; common currency requires common economic governance. He stressed that the new Constitution should be prepared before the enlargement, as he thought that without the institutional reforms, the enlargement could break the ties within the EU. As a politician, he considered possible a transitional form between confederation and federation. (Ciampi, 2000/a, b)

After the intergovernmental negotiations on the Constitutional Treaty (2003 December), the Italian foreign minister of the second Berlusconi Government, Franco Frattini underlined that the new text complied with institutional needs but it was the result of compromises. Frattini expressed his criticism about the limited expansion of the qualified majority voting (especially questions regarding foreign policy) and his disappointment on the modified definition of majority voting in the Council. During the negotiations the Italian government supported the original proposal of the convention. The Italian government missed the EU's Christian roots in the final text. This question was one of the main issues in the Italian debate. Frattini supported the reduction of the Commission's staff. (EU-25 Watch No 1, 2004, pp. 34-35)

The general attitude of Italian Parties concerning the result of the intergovernmental conference was positive, but politicians mostly emphasised that it was a step backwards comparing the draft Constitution. Only the Northern League and the PRC (Party of Refounded Communist) expressed a hostile opinion about the Treaty: the NL because of the reduction of national sovereignty, the PRC because of its 'liberal philosophy'. Both parties expressed their opinion on the need of a referendum regarding the Constitutional Treaty. (EU-25 Watch No 1, 2004)

Before the two referenda in France and the Netherlands, the former President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi said that the victory of the no would indicate the 'fall of Europe'. But after the no vote the Italian Foreign Minister, Gianfranco Fini, was not so concerned, and he added that 'The trauma of the Treaty's defeat in France could become one more reason for reinforcing a loftier notion of Europe in the minds of its peoples, one

not solely of common rules but of common values, with more policy and less administration' (EU-25 Watch No 2, 2006, p. 68)

Most of the analyzers accentuated that the main reason of the no vote was the fear regarding the enlargement, economic problems, the un-transparency of the decision-making process of the EU, the distance between citizens and European institutions and the growing euroscepticism. Similar opinion was represented by other Italian politicians, like the President of the Italian Republic, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi: many citizens 'feel excluded both from decisions of major importance for their future and from those which impact their own every day life.' (EU-25 Watch No 2, 2006, p. 68)

The former European central Bank board member, Tomaso Padoa Schioppa emphasized that the reason of the crisis was the lack of transparency of the constitutional process. (Padoa-Schioppa, 2005)

The Italian Parliament approved the European Constitutional Treaty in 2005. Only two parties voted not in favour of the Treaty: the Northern League and the radical left wing PRC. At this period the Northern League was part of the governing coalition. These two parties underlined the importance of a national referendum on this issue. The PRC criticised the Treaty for its liberal philosophy, and the lack of appropriate guarantees on social rights. (EU-25 Watch No 2, 2006, p. 68) But the Italian Constitution did not allow any referendum on international treaties, to execute such a referendum a constitutional reform would be needed.

Even after the French and Dutch referenda Italy remained a solid supporter of the institutional reform. There was only a moderate debate on the issue of the future of the Constitutional Treaty. The former Vice President of the European Commission, Giuliano Amato suggested the implementation of elements of the Treaty (e.g. European Foreign Minister) in case of the ratification process should not stop in other countries. The Foreign Minister Gianfranco Fini did not refuse the possibility of anticipating the partial application of the text. However, following the suspension of the ratification process in several member states, the realization of such a partial implementation was not possible to execute. As in Italy the idea of a Federalist Europe was widespread, at this time different experts started to underline the possibility of a 'two speed Europe'. (EU-25 Watch No 2, 2006, pp. 70-71)

After the establishment of the centre left government in 2006, there was an observable shift of bias in the Italian foreign policy from the so called pro-Atlantic towards the Europe-centred policy. This does not mean that Silvio Berlusconi's foreign policy did not contain European elements, since Berlusconi also supported Europe-friendly recommendations (e.g. the creation of the European Constitution, or the spread of qualified majority voting to the questions concerning the EU's foreign policy), however opposing the French-German axis he supported the Bush administration's 2003 Iraqi intervention.

The centre left governing coalition led by Romano Prodi had a more balanced foreign policy strategy between the European and the Atlantic orientations, however, the polarisation regarding EU issues was notable in the political party system and in the public opinion as well. We can observe two different approaches: the one is the so called 'English Europe' supported by the centre right, the second is the 'Franco-German Europe' supported by the centre left. The first above mentioned approach is characterised by liberal economy, intergovernmental governance of the EU and the more decisive representation of national sovereignty. The second approach is based on a federalist model of political union. At this

time the new foreign minister, Massimo D'Alema said 'we should relaunch and not abandon the Treaty: at least we preserve the first two parts, those about principles and institutional rules.' (EU-25 Watch No 3, 2006, p. 41)

The Prodi government was also devoted to the deepening of the integration and the institutional reforms. Emma Bonino, minister of European policies, gave voice to her agreement with the Lisbon strategy supporting European growth, and with the reforms resulting from the former strategy, and also regarding Italy (labour market, educational system, pension system). (Dipartimento Politiche Comunitarie, 2006)

During the German Presidency Italy remained a solid supporter of restarting and revitalizing the process of the institutional reform. There was still a possibility to continue the ratification process to reach the critical number of 20 member-states. (Prodi, 2007) In 2007 in the EP Giorgio Napolitano emphasised that Italy 'wants an EU which is strong, efficient, able to face global challenges', and that's why it is important to conclude the institutional reform. (Giorgio Napolitano, 2007)

Following the European Summit in June 2007, the Draft Reform Treaty was qualified like a step backwards. The President, Giorgio Napolitano criticised the political attitude of the Polish-British tandem. Romano Prodi emphasized that the Berlin Declaration was the maximum they could say in that situation. (EU-25/27 Watch No 5, 2007, p. 52)

After the preparation of the Treaty of Lisbon, the public debate started to prepare the ratification process. As Romano Prodi, the Prime Minister said: 'Europe finally has a Treaty which was so much needed, though surely Italy expected a little bit more,' but the years of uncertainty were over, and it is possible to restart to work.' (Ansa, 2007) Umberto Ranieri the Charman of Foreign Affairs Committee of the Lower House of the Italian Parliament emphasized that the government should play an active role in order to disseminate the advantages of the Lisbon Treaty among the people.

In Spring 2008, after the failure of the Prodi-government, early general elections became necessary. That's why the political debate focused on key national issues instead of European ones. Following the Irish 'no', the main political leaders communicated their discontent with it. The President, Giorgio Napolitano stressed the need for continuing the ratification process of the Lisbon Treaty in the other member states. (Napolitano, 2008) The Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi guaranteed to the President of the EC, José Manuel Baroso that the Italian Parliament would soon ratify the Lisbon Treaty. (Il Sole 24 Ore, 2008/a) Berlusconi supported the ratification in spite of the opposition of some politicians of the Northern League declaring the need for a referendum on the Treaty. But after the ratification in the UK, Umberto Bossi declared the support of his party for the Lisbon Treaty. (La Repubblica, 2008)

The result of the December 2008 European Council meeting was the rejection of the Irish demand for the restart of the ratification process of the Lisbon Treaty in the EU's member-states. The compromise helped to convince Ireland to hold a new referendum. Some commentators were afraid of a new Irish no vote because of the growing economic problems in the country and the euroscepticism existing among the Irish society. (EU-27 WATCH No. 8. pp. 44-47) The Treaty was further compared to the giant marlin in 'The Old Man and the Sea' by Hemingway. (Il Sole 24 Ore, 2008/b)

On July 23 2008 the Italian Senate unanimously approved the Lisbon Treaty. The main leaders of the 'Partito Democratico' articulated their positive opinion on the ratification which 'will lead to a simplification of the architectural construction of the European Union' and 'represents an important step forward in the building of a stronger European Union'. Following the approval, the Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Franco Frattini, said that in this case 'Italy confirms its desire for Europe'. (EU-27 Watch. No.7. p. 41)

### **Public opinion concerning the institutional reform**

The deepening of the integration was not only supported by the changing governments, but also by the Italian public. Among the countries of the EU, it was Italy whose population supported this process most. The future of Italy was considered as dependent on the country's role in the EU.

Besides politicians, the Italian public has also been a more ardent devotee of integration than the EU average. According to the results of a 1999 telephone poll with 2003 subjects, the majority of Italian citizens was aware of the fact that the costs of the introduction of the Euro had to be covered by them, but they still believed that this process had an important role in the development of the country. 85% of the respondents thought that it was good for Italy to be member of the EU, and 92% of them considered the further strengthening the European Integration necessary. (Battistelli-Bellucci, 2002)

In the year 2000 the exchange rate of the Euro fell against the US Dollar, which was followed by a decrease of Italians' trust in the common currency and the common institutions. According to the poll of September 2000 carried out by Ipsos, a mere 58% of Italian citizens trusted the Euro, which though higher than the EU average (46%), was lower than the figures of two years before by 20%. (Il Sole 24 Ore, 2000) Similarly to the opinion poll data of the Ipsos, La Polis also came out with results referring to the decrease in people's trust. In 1999 it was shown that 72% of Italians 'trusted very much' the EU institutions, while by 2000 this ratio fell to 57%. In 1999 it was only a thin 25% of the respondents who thought that belonging to the EU was disadvantageous for the country, and this proportion grew to 35% within a year's time. In 1999, the majority (53%) of Italians thought that it was for the advantage of the country and the citizens as well to be member of the EU, while in 2000 only 41% agreed with this statement. (Dente, 2001, p. 1054) Nevertheless, the institutional reforms were still supported by Italians. This was shown by the data of the October 2000 Eurobarometer in which 84% of Italian citizens agreed with the creation of a European Constitution. This ratio by far surpassed the EU average (70%). The outstandingly positive attitudes towards the EU of the Italian public may have originated from the more apparent disappointment in their own national institutions. Thus it was the integration that they expected to lead to the economic development of the country. Together with the devaluation of the common currency, also the trust in Brussels institutions began to decrease. The temporary crisis of the Euro raised the number of Italian Euro-sceptics measurably. (Dente, 2001, 1052)

In 2004 the Flash Eurobarometer showed the confidence of Italians in the Constitutional reform of the European integration. The majority of Italians (82%) seemed to agree that without a Constitution, the Institutions of the European Union could reach a deadlock, so

they recognised the usefulness of a Constitution (European average 69%). (Eurobarometer, 2004)

Italians traditionally have a greater confidence in the EU institutions than in their national ones. In Spring 2005, Eurobarometer survey showed that 56% of Italians trusted the European Union, against 33% who were expressing the opposite opinion. (Eurobarometer, 2005, p. 2)

In 2005 the level of support was lower than in June-July 2004, when more than 90% of Italians supported the Constitution, so had a positive opinion about the constitutional reform. But most of the Italians did not know the text of the Constitution (only 15% knew it). (EU-25 WATCH No. 2., 2006, p. 69) As showed by the Eurobarometer 2006 (Spring) 78 percent of the Italians were not familiar with the whole contents of the European Constitution, or had never heard of the Constitution itself. It is important to underline that the average level of knowledge of the texts of the Constitution was quite low. However, 78% of Italians agreed with the statement that the adoption of the Constitution would make the EU more democratic, 76% more efficient and 76% more transparent.

According to the Eurobarometer survey after the French and Dutch 'no' referendum about the European Constitution, the relative majority of the Italian interviewed (37%) stated that EU Member States should continue the ratification process. And 33% answered that the European Constitution should be renegotiated. Only 6% of Italians said that the European Constitution should be abandoned (abstaining from answering 23%). In spring 2006 '56 per cent of the Italian sample considers that for Italy to be part of the EU is a good thing'. (Eurobarometer 65, 2006, pp. 3-5)

For the majority of Italians the EU membership is still an advantage, however nowadays a wider scale of opinions regarding EU issues can be noticed, and there is a more critical approach in the public debate.

According to the 2007 Spring Eurobarometer survey, In Italy 74% of the sample agreed with the opinion that 'every European decision is the subject of negotiations in which the opinions of the national governments of all Member States are taken into account'. Furthermore, 53% of Italians thought the 'voice of Italy counts in Europe', and 55% anticipated 'that Italian influence in the EU will be even stronger in the future'. Italians decisively support the European management instead of national one in certain policies such as foreign and defence affairs (67%), energy (68%), immigration (67%), the fight against crime (63%), and environment (60%). Italians agreed with the concept of the so-called 'Multi-speed Europe' where those member states which are prepared to strengthen the level of integration of a common European policy in certain areas could do so without waiting for the others. (Eurobarometer 67, 2007, pp. 3-5)

A few months before abandoning the European Constitution, 72% of Italians still had a positive approach to the Constitutional Treaty, and 68% of interviewees were optimistic about the future of the EU. The majority thought that the 'European Union in the next 50 years will have a common army and will be a leading diplomatic power in the world'. 72% agreed with the notion that the European Union should have its own Foreign Minister. (Eurobarometer 67, 2007, pp. 3-5)

In 2008 the relative majority of Italians still had a positive opinion about Italy's membership in the EU, though a clear decline (from 50% to 39%) can be noticed.

37% of Italians thought about EU membership in a positive way, from which Italy had benefited. Half of the interviewees believed that the Italian position was not taken into account at European level. It is important to underline that only 15% of Italians thought that MEPs payed attention to their views and 14% thought the same about the European Commission. 78% of Italian believed that national institutions were not transparent, and 50% thought the same about European institutions. However, the relative majority of Italians maintained confidence in the European Union (40%), but the number of sceptics was growing. (Eurobarometer 69, 2008, pp. 2-3)

### EP elections (2004, 2009)

It is a widely accepted view that at the EP elections voters do not express their opinion about European issues, but they punish their own governments as the EP elections are of second-order to the national parliamentary elections. According to Simon Hix and Sara Hagemann, one of the main reasons for this could be that both voters and parties feel that at the national elections there is more at stake. People do not even know what the EU is really about, and which political group could best represent their interests. This is why the turn-up is lower than in the case of national parliamentary elections. In case of EP election politicians also address the people mostly with internal policy issues. Voters are more strongly affiliated with domestic issues, while in connection with European issues one can not or can hardly observe such attachment. (Hagemann-Hix, 2009)

In the middle of the Italian legislature the EP elections seemed to be a useful tool to measure the satisfaction of the society. The electoral campaigns regarded mainly domestic affairs.

The high social support in Italy is shown in the high proportion of turnout at the European Parliamentary elections. The figures also suggest that during the last elections the EP elections had a lower level of interest in Italy as well.

### Voter turnout 1979 and 2004

European elections	1979	1984	1989	1994	1999	2004	2009
Turnout	84.9%	83.4%	81.4%	74.8%	70.8%	73.1%	65.05%

Source: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/elections/european-parliament-elections-2004-results/article-117482>

Before the EP elections 2004 in order to achieve a larger consensus, the centre-left parties *Margherita*, DS and SDI founded the Tricycle. In the European Parliament, the parties of the Tricycle choose different affiliations: the *Margherita* affiliated with the new pro-European centrist group ALDE, while DS and SDI candidates became part of PSE. The *Verdi* entered into Green group and the PRC into the European United Left.

The *Alleanza Nazionale* remained part of UEN (Union for Europe of the Nations), but the *Forza Italia*, and the centrist UDC affiliated with the PPE. The voter turnout of 73% was higher than the previous European elections (70,8%), even though it was lower than the last national elections (81.5% in 2001).

Before the 2009 EP elections there had been a political debate about the reform of the Italian electoral system in order to avoid party fragmentation. The aim of the reform was to introduce a higher threshold and a fix party list excluding the possibility of voting for individual candidates. This proposal was supported by People of Freedom and not by the PD and the UDC. An academic debate regarding the electoral system emerged as well. Some researchers, like Michelle Comelli and Pierre Darmis criticised the abolition of preferences which inhibit the voters in choosing their representatives directly. ( Comelli, Darnis, 2008)

As a fruit of a long debate in the Italian Parliament to find a large consensus among the main political parties, the electoral bill was modified on February 18 2009, introducing a 4 per cent threshold, every voter could express no more than three preferences. (Senato, 2009)

In Italy, the 2009 elections brought a 6.6% decrease of turn-up as compared to 2004. The EP elections resulted in the victory of right-wing parties. Due to the introduction of the 4% threshold defined by the new election bill, the number of parties entering the European Parliament dropped significantly (from 15 to 5). 33 % of the voters gave their votes to the People of Freedom, while 12% voted for the Northern League. The UDC, not member of the government received 6.5% of the total votes. The real winner of the EP elections was the Northern League, which doubled its voter base as compared to the 2004 elections.

The loss of the left-wing parties is shown by the fact that one year after the National Parliament elections the Democratic Party achieved only 26.1%. The Italy of Values, however, following a tougher opposition campaign became stronger with an 8% vote. The central-left parties all together won 41.1%, while the central-right parties got in total 54.2%. During the campaign the situation of the Democratic Party was negatively influenced by the uncertainties surrounding the new political agent's Parliamentary status. Eventually, 21 representatives of the Democratic Party also containing ex-Christian-democrat politicians joined the group of the Party of European Socialists, which after this even changed its name, and the fraction adopted the new name of Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament. Due to the newly introduced election threshold the smaller parties, similarly to the domestic situation, could not enter the European Parliament either.

## **Conclusion**

According to research data the political debate concerning the EU shows several trends. One of the most important issues is that all of the mainstream parties and the Italian elites, as the social opinion have been pro-European since the 1970s, at the same time we can observe that during the post Maastricht Treaty period, following the transformation of the Italian party system there were more differences in their political attitudes regarding the EU and integration than before.

As to the role of Italy in the EU, despite her population and economic weight, the country has not been able to reach a determining role in the widening the European integration and in the EU's legislation process, which led to several consequences, like e.g. the voicing of

some euroscepticism or the decrease in pro-European approach among parties and the population. Although these developments are observable all over the EU, Italy still belongs to the most pro-European nations.

Nevertheless Italy was one of the founding member of the European integration, the country contributed to the process of the preparation of community legislation only with varying intensity. The reason of this might be found in the fact that until recent years there was not an effective institutional framework of EU-co-ordination on the governmental level. As far as 2006, the rivalry between special ministries under the leadership of different political parties did not make it possible in Italy to establish, like in other member states, an inter-ministerial committee whose exclusive task would have been to deal with affairs of integration and coordination.

For long decades, the Italian politicians used to attribute secondary importance to the integration affairs as compared to the domestic policies. This attitude may have contributed to the fact that Italy never played a decisive role in shaping the development of the Integration. Nevertheless, it appears to be important to note that with her 'follower' EU policy, Italy has always supported all the institutional reforms aimed at deepening the European Integration.

Despite its dominant role in the domestic political structure, the Italian Parliament has only played a limited part in the European legislation process. However, our days present a growing need on behalf of the society to reduce the democratic deficit and to increase the national parliaments' control over the preparatory (first) phase of EU legislation (see Lisbon Treaty.), and nowadays the Italian Parliament uses an effective scrutiny system.

We can observe a significant political break between the Italian centre right and centre left parties concerning their attitude about the European integration. The centre right parties represent a more pro-Atlantic, while the centre left political parties a more pro-European approach.

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