

Roads to Reconciliation

People's Republic of China, Western Europe and Italy
During the Cold War Period (1949-1971)

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Italy's Attention Turns to China Between the '50s and the '60s

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Abstract It is surprising that the very existence and recognition of China had significant repercussions on domestic policy in Italy, which was the country with the strongest Communist party in the West. In the '50s the Italian official policy was compelled by membership in Atlantic alliance and relations with United States, to refuse economic exchanges with China. According to documents found in "Ministero degli Affari Esteri" and in "Aldo Moro" archives, even in the same years political characters such as the Socialist Pietro Nenni, the Christian Democrats Giovanni Gronchi and Amintore Fanfani worked to favour China-Italy exchanges and economic actors like Dino Gentili and Enrico Mattei organised economic Italian missions to China. Since 1960, thanks to trade relations set up in the '50s, and to political events (December 1963 the first centre-left government with Aldo Moro president, Pietro Nenni vicepresident and Giuseppe Saragat to foreign affairs, and at the beginning of 1964 the French political recognition of China), the process was accelerated. Thus, in December 1964 the first commercial agreement between Italy and China was concluded and commercial offices were opened in Rome and Beijing. After 1964 the Chinese question entered Italian foreign policy and was included in parliamentary debates and government programmes. The American diplomacy, dominated by the Vietnam war, opposed any initiative to Chinese recognition but Italy anticipated the better reported, more celebrated US recognition.

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Keywords China. Italy. United States. Cold War. Recognition.

1 Introduction

The success of the Chinese Revolution of 1949 has been viewed in literature as a central event in the Cold War, which would influence it and shift its centre of gravity from Europe to East Asia (Westad 2005; Chen 2001).

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the very existence and recognition of the new state would have significant repercussions on domestic politics in Italy, i.e. the country with the strongest Communist party in the West; nor that relations between the small European country and the populous Asian giant should follow the ups and downs of the Cold War.

As the first stirrings of the new Chinese state were taking place, Italy was emerging from the first phase of the process that would return it to the international stage after emerging from World War II as a destroyed and impoverished nation. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Alcide de Gasperi and Foreign Minister Carlo Sforza, in the immediate post-war years Italy concentrated on rebuilding its economy and its international identity. The country's economic, social and political fragility, together with the hang-overs from Fascism and defeat, would relegate the country to the side-lines of the evolving Western system.

Italy had paid a high price to get back onto the international scene: firstly, forced to accept the unfavourable conditions of the peace treaty that evicted it from its African colonies and conceded nothing on its Eastern borders; and later taking up a clear position with De Gasperi's visit to the United States, the request for a loan and the agreement to the Marshall Plan. The internal repercussions resulting from this taking this side created a bitter climate of conflict which characterised the 1948 election and, later, would shut the Communists out of the government after the clear victory of the Christian Democrats (CD). Italy had chosen to depend economically and politically on the US and by joining NATO in 1949 had plunged into the Cold War logic (Giovagnoli 2016; Di Nolfo 2008; Craveri 2006).

On the national front, the ongoing clash of ideologies arising from the strong presence of the left was evident in parliamentary debates and in party newspapers. The birth, between September and October 1949, of the new Chinese state aroused different reactions in Italian politics. Public debate in *Il Popolo*, the DC's official party paper, concentrated on Italian interests, on the consequences of the loss of the colonies, the economic situation of the country and on the policies implemented to overcome the crisis. As regards international politics, space was given over above all to European and Western issues: Yugoslavia detaching itself from the Eastern front, the German question, atomic control and the meetings of Atlantic committees. *Il Popolo* completely ignored Chinese events, restricting itself in the first few months of 1950 to a consideration of the effects on the workings of the UN of the USSR's boycott of Security Council meetings that were paralysing the most important body of the entire organisation. China was expected to turn to the West if it was looking to grow. It was hoped there would be a shift similar to Tito's Yugoslavia whilst the reference country was still Formosa (*Il Popolo*, 1949-12-07, 1950-01-08).

After all, historically, Italy's interests were chiefly in Europe and Africa, particularly after giving up its colonial claims, and in the Mediterranean; whereas there was no really significant history as far as Asia was concerned, nor were any moves being made towards one as yet.

Left-wing papers treated the events in Asia rather differently. From mid-September *L'Unità* published reports on the front page from their correspondent in Beijing, Velio Spano, a leader of the Italian Communist

Party (ICP), who had been sent to cover developments in the new China and Mao Zedong's latest victories over the nationalists (*L'Unità*, 1949-10-01, 1949-10-06).

The Italian Socialist Party (ISP) too had their paper, *Avanti!*, covering Chinese affairs and, like the *Unità*, it applauded Mao's victory, considered a national victory but also as a victory over Imperialism. On 22nd October, the leader of the PSI, Pietro Nenni, urged that Italy recognise the new country (*Avanti!*, 1949-11-10, 1950-01-22). However, recognition would soon prove to be a far from trivial political issue.

In the months following the proclamation of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the West had approached the question of recognition warily but not too ideologically. In Europe, following in the wake of Great Britain who defended its interests in Hong Kong, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Switzerland recognised the People's Republic.

In Rome, Foreign Affairs Minister, Carlo Sforza, who had served a diplomatic tour of office in the final days of Imperial China and also in the Republic, was keeping a very close eye on developments in the country and did not rule out the possibility of recognition, notwithstanding the fact that in April 1949 Italy had signed a treaty with Nationalist China (Pini 2011).

Very soon the entire scenario would change with the treaty drawn up in February 1950 between the People's Republic and the Soviet Union and, in June of the same year, the outbreak of the Korean War. The East-West conflict intensified with the developments of the crisis, the Western coalition against North Korea, the Chinese attack on American forces and the sanctions imposed by the UN on the PRC prohibiting the sale of some types of strategic materials and goods to China. US allied countries were expected to apply the embargo in their dealings with Communist China (Cain 1995; Chen 1992).

A shaky Italian government found itself caught up in events in a gloomy international climate. Tightly linked to the Western front, Italy in the early '50s was involved in the early phases of European development: a plan for a European political community developing out of the European defence group; moreover, it was dealing with the question of Trieste, which would see a settlement only in 1954 with the London Memorandum. On the domestic front, the DC lost votes compared to the results in 1948. The electoral reform law passed by De Gasperi introducing a majority bonus, later dubbed the 'swindle law', was a failure and led to De Gasperi's resignation in 1953 and his departure from the political stage (Craveri 2006; Varsori 1998; Giovagnoli 1996).

The following governments were no less conditioned by events and viewed recognition of the new state as a Cold War issue that called for strict adherence to the decisions taken by the US. In addition, in the early '50s, although Rome government had managed to carve out a role for itself in the most important organisations of the Western system and

to play a part in the economic reconstruction of Europe, from abroad the country still appeared plagued by political instability and economic and social backwardness.

There was no lack of forward-looking companies, such as FIAT, Edison, Pirelli and Montecatini who, with the support of a handful of politicians, technocrats in the public sector and diplomats, were leading the way towards a modernisation of the country (Petri 2002). The man responsible for encouraging some of these companies to look East to China was the business genius, Dino Gentili, who had worked as a member of the PdA (Action Party) and after the war had returned to business, where a network of influential acquaintances, his support for socialism and friendship with Nenni, were melded together by the attraction China held for him (Capisani 2013; Luti 1994).

Although Italy was officially excluded from the Geneva Conference in 1954, Gentili did meet Zhou Enlai in Geneva and laid the foundations for a long-lasting relationship. In 1955 Pietro Nenni was delegated to Beijing as partisan of peace, but also because he was an influential politician in Italy. Also in 1955, men of industry and finance, led by Dino Gentili, met in Beijing to negotiate the first import-export agreements (Luti 1994; Nenni 1981).

Gentili's initiative was backed above all by Pietro Nenni, but found support also in discussions taking place in the Left on the question of opening up economic and cultural relations with China. Questions in Parliament, articles in party newspapers and solid initiatives, such as the opening in 1953 of the 'China Centre', pressed for an alternative to the two blocs, and also for a reduction of economic dependence on the US (Samarani 2014).

The ideological position of the left-wing parties was backed up by more practical requests from the economic and business sectors that trade between Italy and China be made easier. The government parties, although preoccupied with pressing issues in the country, steered clear of an ideological clash, aware that trade opportunities were opening up in China, particularly interesting considering Italy's trade deficit. Most remarkable was the position of Liberal Foreign Minister, Gaetano Martino, a leading figure promoting European recovery and an assiduous defender of Italian industry, who worked to ensure that the China 'initiative' was not left solely in the hands of the Socialists and Nenni. Responding to pressure from businesses that were unable to satisfy the demands of the Chinese market, for instance the mechanical firm RIV, Martino pressed the US to ease sanctions and started talks with Chinese delegates in Geneva (Saija, Villani 2011; Villani 2008). Nothing came of this because of US vetoes and because China hoped to negotiate beyond strictly trade matters.

What did prevail was the logic of global Cold War: trade and the supply of items considered of strategic importance between Italy and China

were reduced and subjected to US-supervised restrictions, the result of the embargo imposed on Chinese goods during the Korean War.¹

The situation changed during the second half of the '50s. The settlement of the question of Trieste, the admission to the United Nations, the first *détente* between the superpowers, represented for Italy conditions favouring the revival of national issues. The leading actors in Italian foreign policy cultivated the same desire to play a more dynamic and assertive role. The Italian president Giovanni Gronchi wanted Italy to act as a mediator between East and West. The pacifist mayor of Florence Giorgio La Pira favoured dialogue between Christian, Jewish and Muslim. On the domestic front, considering the deep transformation of the Italian society, the left-wing Christian Democrats led by Amintore Fanfani, party secretary at the time, joined the Socialist party in projecting the move from a coalition dominated by the Christian Democrats toward a centre-left coalition.

Events of 1956 showed that new scenarios were opening up in Italy for international relations: the Suez crisis made clear the growing dependence on Middle Eastern oil, whilst Soviet repression of the Hungarian revolt brought about the final break-away of the Italian Socialists (PSI) from the ICP. Those events, coupled with decolonization, favoured the presence of Neo-Atlanticism: foreign policy built around a firm alliance with the US, and a special interest in the Mediterranean area. Furthermore, there was strong commitment for relations with newly independent African and Asian countries that had become or were in the process of becoming independent and above all with Arab countries towards which, it was argued, Italy should adopt a particularly open policy. Such a policy and such stronger ties would serve to bind those countries to the West thereby removing them from Soviet influence. Representatives of this new strategy were, for example, Giovanni Gronchi, Giorgio La Pira and ENI president Enrico Mattei who was very active in North Africa and Middle East (Mammarella, Cacace 2010; Giovagnoli 2010; Bagnato 2004; Ferraris 1996).

In July 1958 a DC-PSDI (Partito Socialista Democratico Italiano) government was formed, led by Amintore Fanfani, who also acted as Foreign Minister. For several years, Italian foreign policy would be marked by his decisions, and his attempts to create a centre-left group would influence Italy's performance on the international stage (Formigoni 2010).

With the support of Fanfani and Gronchi, both of them Neo-Atlanticists, the role of Enrico Mattei in domestic and international politics became more significant. Mattei, the business genius and realist who had turned a failing business (Agip) right around, and transformed it into the solid pub-

1 Archivio storico del ministero degli Affari esteri (ASMAE), Affari politici (1950-1957), b.33, Washington Embassy, telegrams from Martino from Roma on 5th and 6th April 1956, Cattani from Rome on 17th March, 16th April, Brosio from Washington, on 17th, 18th March, 8th, 12th, 15th, 17th April 1956.

lic sector company and oil holding, ENI, was a firm believer that political independence went hand in hand with economic independence and that this was reached through strategic control of energy resources. Mattei negotiated trade agreements with several Mediterranean countries as well as with Iran, the USSR and, finally, with China. As a public official, in actual fact, he had personal contacts and high level meetings with countries with whom ENI was negotiating, going beyond his remit and practically implementing his own foreign policy.

He realised China's enormous potential, the opportunities arising out of the frictions between China and Russia and the revolutionary impact of economic and geopolitical changes taking place following the process of decolonisation (Rocca 2014; Tremolada 2010; Samarani 2007; Bagnato 2004; Perrone 1989; Pietra 1987). Towards the end of 1958, he went to China and set up profitable bilateral agreements that remained in place even after his death in 1962.

2 Trade Relations Offices

Alongside Mattei's work, during the transition years from centrism to centre-left, trade relations set up in the '50s with the Far East grew rapidly enough for the Hong Kong representative office for trade and commerce to become more important. Rome agreed that contacts with Chinese delegates be kept up and subsequently meetings were arranged to lay the foundations for an increase in trade between the two countries.²

The process was accelerated by the announcement in January 1964 that France officially recognised the PRC. France had realised back in the '50s that recognising the PRC would be of great advantage to France – an opportunity to recover the influence it had had in earlier centuries. Having rid himself of the Algerian question in 1962, De Gaulle audaciously established diplomatic relations with China, thereby signalling France's independence from the Western bloc (Krouck 2012; Suri 2003; Cesari, Varaschin 2003; Vaisse 1998).

The first centre-left government made up of DC, the Socialist Party, the Social Democrats (PSDI) and the Republican Party (PRI) had just formed in Italy. Leading figures held important posts: Aldo Moro Prime Minister, Pietro Nenni deputy prime minister and Giuseppe Saragat at the Foreign Office. Although Italy could not follow in France's steps, it was in a position to recognise trade interests and relations, which had been in place with China for many years. In February 1964, between Chinese supporter Nenni and the Western-looking Saragat, with Moro at the head of gov-

2 ASMAE, telegrammi ordinari, Gran Bretagna e colonie, arrivi e partenze, 1962, from Hong Kong to Rome, 12th July 1962; ASMAE, Gran Bretagna consolati, telegrammi ordinari, 1963, Cattani from Rome, 7th May 1963.

ernment, an understanding was reached which managed to hold things together internally and at the same time guarantee loyalty to the Atlantic pact achieved through Saragat's declaration. The declaration recalled that the Chinese question had existed for a long time and stated that it was not important to "know whether our government means to proceed to an agreement with the Peking government, but rather [...] when it will be in the best interests of Italy and her allies, and of the democratic free world, to reach such recognition" (Atti parlamentari). This statement by the Foreign Minister proved both that Italy was postponing diplomatic recognition, which would not have been accepted by Washington, but that it wanted to negotiate towards a normalisation of trade relations.

These remarks were followed up: an Italian trade-diplomatic mission met leading Chinese businessmen in Beijing in June to lay the groundwork.³ This was followed by diplomatic exchanges at the Chinese Embassy in Egypt to deal with technical issues in the run-up to actual talks. The opening of trade offices, moreover, would have to be agreed with the Americans. Once the inevitable difficulties had been overcome, the official statement regarding the new Chinese policy was issued in December, above all in answer to Washington's request that the November presidential elections should not be influenced by any such announcement. The decision taken by Saragat and his government, coming as a result of national economic and political pressure as well as in the light of overseas events, was an independent act of foreign policy in an already rather boisterous year. The new centre-left government had had to manage a negative economic situation, which was partly responsible for a cabinet crisis in June, solved at the end of July with the appointment of a second Moro-led government. In addition, Antonio Segni, President of the Republic, had fallen ill, while the Communist Party had lost its leader, Palmiro Togliatti, who died at Yalta on 21st August (Varsori 1998; Ferraris 1996).

At an international level, the moves for a creation of a united Europe had stalled through French hostility for admission of Great Britain, whilst on the Atlantic front, plans for a multi-lateral defence force, a strategic move to govern US-Europe relations, and negotiations for an agreement on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, were challenging European governments.

On the world stage, US' involvement in Vietnam, the first Chinese nuclear weapons test in October and the resignation of Communist Party First Secretary, Nikita Krushchev, were creating problems for the future of Asia, bringing the Cold War back to front-stage (Di Nolfo 2008).

World events, above all the clash with the Vietcong, had some bearing on US reaction which was not overly negative for they had in any case

3 Archivio centrale dello stato (ACS), Carte Moro (CM) (1953-1978), series 3, b. 61, f. 117, telegramma segretissimo by Saverio Santaniello, Hong Kong, 23rd June 1964; news on meeting of Vittorelli, Santaniello with Mao Zedong also in ASMAE, 1964, telegrammi ordinari Gran Bretagna e consolati.

accepted French recognition. On 14th December, Saragat, meeting US Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, stated once more that “we recognise that the greater responsibility in this area lies with the United States, and we have not yet decided to recognise China, nor will we do so without first having opportune, friendly talks with the United States”.⁴ In February 1965, Prime Minister Moro put an end to the matter before the Italian Senate stating once again that diplomatic recognition of China must occur in an atmosphere of *détente* and peace and that at that time circumstances were not favourable. But, as Saragat had clarified in his speech to the Chamber of Deputies on 4th December, the Chinese question involved four issues: as well as trade matters and the question of diplomatic recognition, on the table were also UN membership for the PRC and Formosa.⁵

From contacts with diplomats at the US embassy in Rome, it appeared that the United States, caught up in the war in Vietnam and the domino theory, had returned to a Cold War logic and feared that they would soon have to take the war in North Vietnam to China. For this reason, they concentrated on the hypothesis that Italy at the United Nations, by abstaining from voting on the ‘important question’, would open the way for future recognition of China. By following the French method of going it alone, in isolation, the chance for a real united Western front would be compromised.⁶ In actual fact, in 1961, in an attempt to frustrate the annual requests by the Asian countries for China to be admitted to the UN, Italy had proposed a resolution, jointly with Australia, Columbia, Japan and the United States, which would recognise that the decision that China be given a seat was ‘an important question’ and therefore was to be taken by a supermajority of two thirds of members present and voting.⁷ The Johnson administration kept up a firm opposition to allowing China into the organisation and granting it a permanent seat on the Security Council, even though they were fully aware that with the entry of decolonised countries, the majority opposing the proposal had been reduced over the years to a mere handful of votes. The State Department put great pressure on allied and friendly countries to prevent Communist

4 Telegramma segretissimo by Saragat from Ottawa, 14th December 1964, ACS, CM, series 3, b. 61.

5 Intervention of the Foreign Minister in the discussion of the budget of the Foreign Ministry, to the Chamber of Deputies to the Commission of 75, 3rd December 1964 in ACS, CM, series 3, b. 61.

6 Memorandum Cottafavi, 21st November 1964, ACS, CM, series 3, b. 61.

7 In the attempt to render useless the annual demands from the Asian states, on the admission of China, the United States, together with Australia, Colombia, Japan and Italy, had proposed a procedural motion that declared a decision on making the Chinese seat an ‘important question’ and so to be made by a qualified majority of two-thirds of members present and voting. Vinci to Moro on the Chinese ‘seat’, 2nd November 1965, ACS, CM, series 3, b. 61.

China's succeeding in its bid, which would constitute a serious political defeat for Washington.⁸

3 Italy, China and the UN

The man who would create a breach in the agreement which had held firm till then, and provoke a confrontation with the US and with the other leading figure of Italian politics, Aldo Moro, a character completely different to his own, was Amintore Fanfani, Foreign Minister from March 1965 to 1968, and appointed president of the 20th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in September. As seen above, Fanfani had already proved he was interested in, and in favour of relations with, Communist China, however fragmentary his view, he was then convinced that the solution to the conflict in Vietnam was China. Like his friend, Giorgio La Pira, whose concurrent mission to Hanoi he had encouraged, Fanfani believed that world peace depended upon peace in Vietnam (Giunipero 2010; Sica 2011). For this reason, in Autumn 1965, in view of the 20th General Assembly, he charged, or at least encouraged, the leader of the Italian delegation to the UN, friend and sympathiser, Senator Giacinto Bosco, to present a resolution concerning the admission of China to the United Nations.

What sparked this proposal were recent developments on the international scene: the increased importance of Communist China after the atomic explosion, the idea that the fall of Khrushchev might bring about a Sino-Soviet *rapprochement*, thereby increasing the weight of the Communist world and making East-West relations more difficult. Furthermore, French recognition of Beijing, together with recognition from several Francophone African countries, had raised a new a consideration of the possibility of reopening the discussion and voting at the UN on the admission of Communist China. The question had, moreover, been tabled for discussion at the 20th Assembly upon the request of Cambodia.

The proposal produced intense diplomatic activity between Italy and the United States, involving the Italian ambassador to the US, Sergio Fenoaltea, Foreign Minister Fanfani, Giacinto Bosco himself and US Secretary of State, Dean Rusk. In Italy, there were stormy clashes between government and opposition. Although in favour of the initiative, Moro had to mediate both at home and abroad, and put up with US hostility.

The Bosco resolution has been discussed in literature, exhaustively by Elisa Giunipero. Some passages only need be referred to here which confirm that the Chinese question was not a minor issue for Italy considering

8 Notes by Ministry of Foreign Affairs concerning 'Questione della rappresentanza cinese alle Nazioni Unite', 23rd September 1965 in ACS, CM, series 3, b. 61.

its national and international implications, and that it was closely tied with its Atlantic choice.

The first draft of the resolution, which made reference above all to the universality of the UN, asked China to show willing to bring itself in line with the principles of the Charter, thereby contributing to the solution of the conflict. It asked the US to step down from its polemic and sterile opposition on the Chinese question. UN members were further asked to undertake an objective analysis of the issues, of the difficulties and conditions, means and timelines for a solution to the question, in the event adopting new procedures and measures.⁹

The draft was sent on 25th September to Moro who, while approving the proposal, pointed out that it was not possible to set the People's Republic on the same footing as the US, nor to submit concrete, coordinated proposals. Moro reminded members of the position taken up the previous year and which was still valid: recognition was a question of time, it was unwise to leave the Americans isolated, nor was it prudent to encourage giving up Western solidarity which represented the best guarantee that the politics of *détente* would continue.¹⁰

As confirmation of what Moro was hinting at, that the question of admitting China to the UN was for the United States an extremely sensitive issue, was the outcome of the meeting promoted by Fanfani with Dean Rusk on 26th September during which the Italian minister hoped to convince the US Secretary of State of the soundness of the proposal.

During the meeting, Dean Rusk illustrated how US national interests were focused on the conflict taking place in South-East Asia, which, in his view, depended very much on the Chinese attitude. For this reason he had little hope there would be any negotiation with Vietnam because of Chinese opposition, and war with China could not be ruled out. In addition, he held a negative view of the Italian proposal, for China's entry to the UN "would be to reward Communist China's combative stance, a further step toward war". Furthermore, European lack of interest in Vietnam preoccupied him as did also De Gaulle's policy, which strengthened the conviction on the part of Chinese Communists that they were on the right road. Finally, he asked that hasty decisions be avoided at least until year's end and, rather – but this fell on deaf ears – that Fanfani, President of the Assembly, should help persuade smaller countries of the consequences of the People's Republic of China's entry to the UN.¹¹

Dean Rusk would be consulted on several occasions and would never change his position. In a meeting with ambassador Fenoaltea on 13th Octo-

9 Vinci to Moro, 25th September 1965, ACS, CM, series 3, b.61.

10 Moro to Fanfani, 26th September 1965, ACS, CM, series 3, b. 61.

11 Fanfani Rusk discussion, 26th September 1965, ACS, CM, series 3, b.61.

ber, the Secretary of State once again expressed his opposition to the Italian initiative. In his analysis, China had become weaker after the setback in Indonesia with the failed *coup d'état* by left-wing officers linked with the Chinese. China had lost not only its strongest support in Asia, but also the favour of some African states. It was time, therefore, to persuade the leaders in Beijing that they were set on the wrong road, whereas encouragement to continue their aggressive policy would push them into war.¹²

To complete the Italian proposal came the setting up of an *ad hoc* commission to investigate and report at the next assembly on the issues concerning UN membership. This addition to the proposal was supported also by Moro for it could represent a fall-back in the event of an uncertain outcome in the vote at General Assembly, an alternative to the 'important question'.¹³ It was Bosco above all who defended the commission claiming it would produce objective data as a basis for later votes; would ward off the entry of China counter to US wishes; safeguard the integrity and prestige of the UN; and give the two super-powers time to consolidate cooperation, which was indispensable for the smooth running of the organisation.

In a final talk on 4th November between Rusk and Fenoaltea, it was confirmed that US objections were being influenced by the war in Vietnam. According to Rusk, the call for universality might pose the question of divided states but the certainty of having still a small margin of votes in favour of the success of the 'important question' argued in favour of rejecting the creation of a commission. As confirmation of Washington's wish to hold to its position, on 16th November, the day before Italy was to declare its vote, planned for 17th, Aide to US Secretary of State, Joseph Sisco, deemed it wise to deposit the text of a resolution that aimed to confirm the validity of the 1961 decision, thereby preceding the presentation of a procedural motion by supporters of Beijing and warding off for that year the danger of a pro-Chinese motion.¹⁴

To this end he called a meeting in which the signatories of the 1961 motion as well as another four states – Brazil, the Philippines, Thailand and Madagascar – took part.

On the other side, China had toughened its position: isolated in the stirrings of the Cultural Revolution, it had reacted to consideration of its entry by setting what diplomacy felt were unacceptable conditions, which were in line with the ideological propaganda being carried on at that time. China required that condemnation for the aggression on Korea

12 From Washington Fenoaltea, 10th October 1965 and 15th October 1965, ACS, CM, series 3, b. 61.

13 Vinci to Moro, 2nd November 1965, ACS, CM, series 3, b. 61.

14 On talks with Rusk, Fenoaltea to Moro, 4th November 1965; on Joseph Sisco's initiative, Vinci to Moro, 16 November 1965, in ACS, CM, series 3, b. 61.

be withdrawn, that the charter be modified so that all independent states should in any case be admitted to the UN, whilst, together with Formosa, other states considered imperialist puppets should be expelled. Above all, China refused the idea of the 'two Chinas', which inspired the Bosco and Fanfani motion (Chen 2001).

That the Chinese conditions were found to be unacceptable made it easier for Moro to reject Communist demands to give up the Atlantic pact and to resist pressure from the Socialist groups which, while rejecting the Communist motion, insisted on an undertaking to create favourable conditions for China to join the UN. Nenni, lastly, showed that he appreciated the Prime Minister's position and pushed for abstaining only in the Council of Ministers, with the option of making this public, if necessary, only after the vote.¹⁵

China's position, argued Moro, was in contrast with the norms of world cooperation; nationalist China, a permanent member, could not be expelled; the military balance of the Pacific would shift and, finally, the issue could not be dealt with separately from the issue of Vietnam.

On 7th November, summing up for Fanfani the reservations which had been expressed in the Council of Ministers, Moro pointed out that it had been argued that China's admission brought no advantage either to *détente* or to the USSR, nor did it favour the functioning of the UN, of whom China was highly critical. Far from it, for the existence of Formosa was still important from a military point of view and also as a haven for Chinese refugees, and Christians. Italy would have to study conditions which would encourage a solution to international problems as well as Italy-US relations.¹⁶

Support for the ally was confirmed and the problems with Fanfani were resolved by Moro's resignation in January 1966 and the formation in February of the third Moro-led government, which included supporters of the Scelba and Fanfani line.

The motion was presented again in following years, the US position remaining the same, because of the ongoing war in Vietnam. The proposal of an *ad hoc* committee, particularly unpopular with Beijing, was also put forward again but was voted down by the General Assembly.

Fanfani's diplomatic moves have met with varying criticism: on the one hand, some commentators see it as an opening up to the left, on the other, as just another episode illustrating a foreign policy which several times earned Fanfani and Italy the charge of amateurism and unreliability on the Atlantic front, perfectly in line with American complaints that the country represented NATO's weak link. What did become apparent, as shown also by La Pira's mission to Hanoi at that time, was Fanfani's tendency to attrib-

15 Nenni to Moro, 29th October 1965, ACS, CM, series 3, b. 61.

16 Moro to Fanfani, 7th November 1965, ACS, CM, series 3, b. 61.

ute to Italy a role as mediator in international affairs, which did not always mirror Italy's real political influence (Gentiloni Silveri 2010; Varsori 1998).

4 Recognition

In the following years, with the opening of trade offices, the volume of trade between Italy and China increased but conditions remained unfavourable both internally and internationally for recognition of the People's Republic of China to be granted. The opportunity would not arise until 1969. At the end of 1968 the Rumor-led government appointed Pietro Nenni as Foreign Affairs Minister. On 24th January 1969, Nenni, without US consultation, announced that he wished to resolve the question of recognition of the People's Republic, showing that he was determined to bring about a change in Italian foreign policy. But Nenni was not unaware of the effects this would have on the two sides of his party, nor of the consensus the initiative might garner among PCI dissidents and moderate public opinion, hostile to the United States after their intervention in Vietnam (Di Nolfo 2010; Olla Brundu 2006). In addition, Nenni gave due consideration also to the many new scenarios on the international front.

Internationally, the climate was one of *détente*, with a round of talks announced by the new US president, Richard Nixon, and a further move towards European integration proposed by French president, Georges Pompidou; the Federal Republic was opening up to the USSR and Eastern Europe, and the trend would be confirmed in the course of 1969 with Chancellor Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik*.

From Washington, Italian Ambassador Egidio Ortona informed his government that President Nixon wanted to distinguish himself from his predecessors by forging a new US policy for China (Ortona 1989; Nenni 1983). China itself was also ready for change. With the excesses of the revolution behind him, Mao had undertaken to set both party and society, both on the verge of collapse, in order. The People's Republic felt isolated internationally and surrounded by enemy countries: India, Japan, South Korea, and also, after the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the announcement of Soviet policy with the Brezhnev doctrine, the Soviet Union. The ideological disputes between the two Communist countries, which had appeared at the end of the 1950, were spreading to affect inter-state relations. The Chinese worried that Moscow might extend its interventions to Asia. Sino-Soviet tension was bound to increase and in March 1969 fears became reality with the border conflict along the Ussuri river (Luthi 2008; Chen 2001).

Nenni's initiative, therefore, came at a most appropriate time. China welcomed the Italian proposal: in February, talks between the Chinese *chargé d'affaires* and Minister Walter Gardini of the Italian Embassy in France started in Paris. It was clear from the very start that China lay down

the condition that the PRC be acknowledged as the only lawful government to represent the Chinese people. This brought with it a break in diplomatic relations with Taiwan and, at the UN, the withdrawal of the unpopular *ad hoc* committee along with the vote in favour of admission of the People's Republic as permanent member.

Although France also had been asked in 1964 to recognise a single China, in Italy's case, the request was prejudicial. In previous years, Italy had always upheld the 'two Chinas' theory and there was still within the DC and the other governing parties, leading members favouring that line. Furthermore, as other countries, Belgium and Canada were considering the issue of recognition. It was vital that Italian talks should not leave any space for misunderstanding (Di Nolfo 2010).

The negotiation process started with difficulty. Aware of the Italian initiative, American diplomats recommended to be cautious, fearing negative consequences on the Vietnam peace negotiations under way in Paris. They opposed the Italian consent to the third point, which meant Taiwan's expulsion from the United Nations. These exceptions stopped the initial rush of Nenni who had not yet replied to the Chinese claims, when, in July 1969, a new split within the PSI brought down the Rumor government that was reformed in August as a single party with Aldo Moro as Foreign Minister. It was Moro, therefore, who overcame the internal resistance. Again, it was Moro who had to deal with two cabinet crises in February-March and July 1970 and who led the talks in Paris, bringing to a close the long process.

Moro introduced a more gradual approach: he understood time was necessary to solve the problem of recognising China and not breaking up with United States.

Italy was disposed to recognise the PRC as the only Chinese government. But as Moro considered the subsequent conditions unacceptable, he gained time. In October 1969 the talk with president Nixon, the speech in the General Assembly of UN, and the conversation with the Canadian Foreign Minister were in agenda. Canada was also engaged in recognising Communist China. Consequently, Rome's attitude did not change, as in the previous years, Italian delegation in New York voted 'the important question' and abstained on the Albanian resolution. In the meantime Moro's advisors were looking for a solution, a compromise not to dislike Americans. Recognise China and not to expel Taiwan.

In December Chinese diplomats refused the proposal submitted by Rome and negotiations interrupted again. In Italy, on 12th December 1969 a bomb exploded in the Banca nazionale dell'agricoltura in Milan, provoking a cabinet crisis (Di Nolfo 2012).

On the Chinese side, negotiations were carried out with great care and caution, often interrupted because of ideological tensions accompanying the end of the Cultural Revolution and by international events such as US intervention in Cambodia.

In summer 1970, Moro understood that China had toughened its position and during the long negotiation process Italian diplomacy came to accept the Chinese claims. Then the problem to be solved was American reactions. It is understandable that Nenni wanted Italy to break from the Washington line. As a matter of fact, Moro, who in the previous years had supervised the Atlantic loyalty and expressed 'understanding' for the US involvement in Vietnam, had finally come to believe that it was time for "a more flexible attitude on the part of the United States towards the Chinese issue".¹⁷

Moro's choice resulted from the awareness of the need to be realistic and attentive and to adopt a responsible vision of the world balance of power, which was shifting towards China. Moro realised that China was emerging as a world power from the 'carcass of colonised China'. There were a huge, organised population (then over 800 million), a nuclear arms store and a revolutionary ideology, which made China influential both among libertarian movements of the Third World and among subversive movements in the West. Although the PRC did not implement a policy of aggression and did not aspire to being a third world power, Moro believed it was very likely that China would become a world superpower, and this would be a determining factor both regionally and globally. This confirmed his view that the time was ripe for a united Western Europe to establish close, workable links in the different areas of the world, to work together to ensure that the meeting of great powers would not give rise to a conflict.¹⁸ Recognition of China, then, fell into Italy's plans and prospects for the future and was not motivated by an anti-American or an anti-Soviet feeling.

Moro's attention to global policy did not neglect attention to Europe's future. He was worried by a clear tension in transatlantic relations. EEC's choices, CSCE (Conference on security and cooperation in Europe)'s initiative and German *Ostpolitik* were not approved by Nixon; on the contrary Europe did not like bilateral dialogue between US and USSR and intervention in Vietnam. So American attitude toward Europe represented another reason for Moro's choice.

At the end of October, after almost two years of talks, a joint *communiqué* was issued with similar wording to the Franco-Chinese of 1964, accompanied by a unilateral Italian declaration which satisfied China. In 1971, the Italian delegation to the UN voted in favour of the motion proposed by Albania which called for Formosa to be substituted by Mao's China as member of the UN and of the Security Council, thereby forgoing application of the US-backed 'important question' (Di Nolfo 2012).

17 Conversation Minister with secretary of state US, 10th October 1969, ACS, CM, b. 138.

18 Telegramma riservatissimo Moro, 6th December 1970, Meeting in Djakarta. Italian ambassadors in South east Asia and Far East. Conclusions and instructions, 1970, ACS, CM, b. 150.

The Italian diplomatic initiative was a national success and showed that the historic moment could be grasped. With Canada and Belgium, Italy anticipated the better reported, more celebrated US recognition. The time of isolation for the PRC was over.

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