

THE ITALIAN GEOPOLITICAL CODE

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<p>Article history:</p> <p><i>Received:</i> 27 March 2018</p> <p><i>Accepted:</i> 28 April 2018</p>	<p>Abstract: The aim of the research is to outline the main features of the Italian geopolitical code, that is to say the manner in which a given country orientates itself toward the world. Our argument is that – even though a secondary one – also Italy has shaped its own way to approach international relations. The work takes into consideration relevant events in Italian history and contemporary geopolitical orientation as reported into official strategic documents. The final result is the profile of a country feeling its founding role of the main Western regional structures focusing mainly on regional interests. Nonetheless, its Italian friendly attitude toward outsider of Western bloc is a relevant peculiarity that brought Italy to be seen as a reliable partner by many global actors, even those opposing the West.</p>
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The lack of studies about the Italian geopolitical code, clashes with the mosaic of histories, cultures and languages¹ that are connected with the peculiar geographical position of the peninsula. Even though in Italy foreign policy has never been a relevant matter of public discussions in both electoral campaigns² or in day-by-day politics, we want to argue that Italy effectively shaped a proper approach to international politics. In this research, our

aim is to define the main features of the Italian geopolitical code. To this extent, we want to give an input to its study and this is the reason why we want to deep the subject of Italian perception of geopolitics. Consequently, we will firstly present on the general definition of geopolitical code. Secondly, we will analyze the main features of the Italian history and political culture. We will define the priority geopolitical areas, which Italy considers of strategic relevance focusing on official documents by Ministries and academia. In this way, we will let emerge some long-standing attitudes of Italian foreign policy capable to influence the manner in which Italy behaves during the time. A relevant focus will be made on the nature of Italian Euroscepticism as understood by those Eurosceptic parties having parliamentary representation. Finally, we will underline Italian approach in dealing with countries that are opposed to the Western bloc in order to show a certain degree of Italian peculiarity. We will try to sum up some consistent conclusions and considerations.

The geopolitical code is an underestimated yet important analytical concept in the

¹ Interestingly, Italy is the country of many native national minorities. The most relevant are the French-speaking population in the region of Valle d'Aosta, the German-speaking population of South Tyrol, the different 'Ladin' languages diffused between the provinces of Trento, Bozen and Belluno. Finally, one could mention the Arbëreshë people in the deep South of Italy, made up of ancient Albanian community residing in Italy and preserving their cultural peculiarities, included the language.

² Teresa Coratella, "Italy Votes: Europe in the Italian Election," *European Council on Foreign Relations*, February 28, 2018, http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_italy_votes_europe_in_the_italian_election.

comprehension of international relations and foreign policies. Quoting the political geographer Colin Flint, we can define the geopolitical code *sic et simpliciter* as “the manner in which a country orientates itself toward the world”.³ The same author together with professor Peter Taylor, operationalizes the concept of geopolitical code through five different assumptions:

1. Who are our current and potential allies?
2. Who are our current and potential enemies?
3. How can we maintain our allies and nurture potential allies?
4. How can we counter our current enemies and emerging threats?
5. How do we justify the four calculations above to our public, and to the global community?⁴

Furthermore, scale and orientation of such a code are of fundamental importance. Actually, in understanding geopolitics according to a given state one has to consider not only physical elements such as its geographical position. Importantly, we have to take into consideration what this country considers the scope of its foreign policy and its area of influence together with its belonging to geopolitical blocs. The scholar Igor Okunev has analyzed similar considerations. Specifically, he underlines how the contemporary historical context witnessed the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. In such a context, the end of bipolar world has brought to the instability of geopolitical codes favoring – inter alia – the creation of *ad hoc* coalition into the international realm.⁵

The geopolitical code has found many applications in order to understand how a country perceive itself in the global arena

as well as its posture toward the challenges it faces. Most of the times, the Great Powers have been used as case studies. To this extent, outstanding examples of geopolitical codes are the UK’s policy of Decline during the first decades of the last century, the French *Grandeur*, or the more recent War on Terror promoted by the US.⁶ Finally yet importantly, one can mention Russian New Eurasianism in its Official declination.⁷

Generally, other countries’ geopolitical codes have not been analyzed in such an extensive way, for their lack of relevance in the world of international relations. Italy is not an exception. The first useful step to make in order to start this analysis is the collecting of historical facts that had outstanding consequences for Italy. This first historical part will allow the reader to understand in a proper way the roots of Italian-made geopolitics. In doing so, we have decided to take into account those events that are relevant to our aim. Firstly, the phenomena of migrations from Italy following the unification of the country in 1861 mainly toward Americas which has brought to the establishment of a sizeable Italo-American diaspora. The second historical process to consider is the power politics pursued by Italy until the fall of fascism that led to the establishment of Italy’s Empire with colonies in Cyrenaica, Tripolitania and in the Horn of Africa. The end of Second World War is the third element to consider. The tragedies of the war, the defeat of the Axis, and the vital need of external aid will persuade the Italian new ruling class to align with the Western bloc.⁸ Such an alignment suited the vested interests of Italy at various level. Externally, it provided a military guarantee against external aggressions while internally the

³ Flint, Colin. Introduction to Geopolitics. 3rd ed. London, New York: Routledge, 2016. P. 52.

⁴ Flint, Colin; Taylor, Peter J. Political Geography: World-Economy, Nation-State and Locality. 6th ed. Harlow: Prentice Hall, 2011. Pp. 49-50.

⁵ Okunev, Igor. The New Dimension of Russia’s Geopolitical Code // Turkish Policy Quarterly 12, 2013, No. 1, pp. 67-75. Mode of access: <http://turkishpolicy.com/Files/ArticlePDF/the-new-dimensions-of-russias-geopolitical-code-spring-2013-en.pdf>

⁶ Naji, Saied; Jawan, Jayum A.; Soltani, Fakhreddin. The US Geopolitical Code and Its Global Objectives during the First Term of George W. Bush’s Presidency // *Pensee Journal* 76, 2014, No. 3, p. 178.

⁷ Smith, Graham. The Masks of Proteus: Russia, Geopolitical Shift and the New Eurasianism // *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 24, 1999, No. 4, pp. 488-488.

⁸ In this case as Western bloc, we mean both NATO and European Coal and Steel Community, the first step in Western European integration process that will bring to the establishment of the European Union.

Marshall plan was the main tool for re-build the entire country. Moreover, the support of the West to Italy has granted the Democratic-Christian main party the national government for many decades, isolating the Italian Communist party, that together with the French one was one of the strongest in Western Europe.

More than seventy years have passed since the end of the Second World War and some thirty since the end of the Cold War. The *Belpaese* nowadays is one of the key countries in Western geostrategic framework with the third-largest economy of the Eurozone⁹ and the perception it has of itself seems pursue such direction. To this extent, it is enough to read official strategic documents such as the 2015 Italian White Paper and the Multi-annual Programmatic Document 2017-2019. Both of them document Italian official posture in international politics and are published by the Ministry of Defense. The former concerns security, defense and issues related with international cooperation. The latter explains the practical application of the White Paper and presents to the Parliament the foreseen expenditure for the period taken into consideration.

From this works, we can clearly get that Italian vision of the world on two fundamental pillars: the Euro-Atlantic dimension and the Euro-Mediterranean one.¹⁰

Starting from the Euro-Atlantic context, this is intended not bluntly as a geographic area but as a political space of shared values such as freedom, wealth, peace and development.¹¹ As far as the Euro-Atlantic dimension is concerned, it is recognized as a region “cornerstone of the

national interests”.¹² Consistently, the Italian commitment as NATO and European Union member is clearly recognizable. Effectively, the two aforementioned regional organizations made up the very basis of West as geopolitical bloc. It is easy to understand the reasons why of Italian commitment in the Western political and security structures. After the Second World War, Italy was left defeated and destroyed and was willing to show itself to the international community as a new democratic republic seeking to be part of the new European integration process. Actually, Italy has been among the founding members of both NATO in 1949 and ECSC 1951. Up to now, Italian membership in these organizations does not seem to be put in question.

In spite of rumors spread by mass media about the possibility for Italy to leave the European Union, such a scenario results to be unlikely. In fact, if one considers Euroscepticism just as a critical orientation towards EU and not as a demand of definite withdrawal, we can understand how the real possibility of “leave” for Italy are very low now. In order to understand the actual nature of Italian Euroscepticism and its aim, we decided to take into consideration the declared willingness of the parties represented today in the Parliament after the 4th March 2018 national elections.¹³ The two main Eurosceptic parties in Italy are the Five Star Movement and the League. Even though these parties strongly voiced in the past about leaving the Eurozone or even the European Union, the electoral programs of them both tells a different story. As for the former, Five Star Movement asked in the past for a referendum – impossible under the current Italian Constitution – for eventual withdrawal from Euro. Surprisingly, all questions related with the European Union and the currency are simply not present into the electoral program of the Movement.¹⁴ Moreover, the ‘political chief’

¹² Ibid. P. 42.

¹³ The decision to consider parties’ orientation and not the public opinion is due to the fact that article 75 of the Italian Constitution openly forbids referenda about *inter alia* matters related with international treaties.

¹⁴ Movimento 5 Stelle. Programma Elettorale Movimento 5 Stelle. Rome, 2018. Mode of access: <http://dait.interno.gov.it/documenti/trasparenza/>

⁹ Jones, Gavin. Italy’s Economic Renaissance Is Less than Meets the Eye // *Reuters*. November 8, 2017. Mode of access: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-italy-economy-analysis/italys-economic-renaissance-is-less-than-meets-the-eye-idUSKBN1D829Q>

¹⁰ Documento Programmatico Pluriennale 2017-2019 / Italian Ministry of Defense. Rome, 2017. Mode of access: https://www.difesa.it/Content/Documents/DPP/DPP_2017_2019_Approvato_light.pdf

¹¹ Libro Bianco per La Sicurezza Internazionale E La Difesa / Italian Ministry of Defense. Rome, 2017. Mode of access: https://www.difesa.it/Primo_Piano/Documents/2015/04_Aprile/LB_2015.pdf

of the party defined the European Union as “the natural home of Italy and of the Movement”¹⁵ during the electoral campaign.

League as well faced a certain degree of inconsistency in its Euroscepticism. In fact, on one end the official website “Salvini Premier” – promoting the premiership of the party’s leader Matteo Salvini – openly put into question Italy’s membership into the European Union in case radical reforms of the founding treaties are not going to be made.¹⁶ On the other hand, the League subscribed a binding common program with its center-right allies. The document is still claiming reforms of the founding treaties.¹⁷ Importantly, all the threats of Italy’s withdrawal from the EU disappear in what should have been the government program of the coalition as a whole.

Finally, we can state that Euroscepticism is on the rise in Italy for both Five Star Movement and League collected together more than 50% of the votes. Nonetheless, it seems to be inconsistent in its demands and ideologically heterogeneous. Moreover, the radical proposal of ‘Italexit’ is not a viable option for neither of the aforementioned parties. Thus, taking into account Hirschman categories,¹⁸ we can state that Italian Euroscepticism is still based on ‘voice’ rather than ‘exit’ option.

As for the other pillar of the West – NATO – no one of the political parties represented into the Parliament has made claims about the

possibility of abandoning the US-led military alliance. Indeed, Italy perceives itself as one of the cornerstone of integration and security in the region and NATO has a fundamental role “in contemporary and future scenarios of international security”.¹⁹ It is enough to mention that currently, Italy is hosting 59 US military basis on its soil.²⁰

The abovementioned White Paper does not take into account only the Euro-Atlantic region. The Euro-Mediterranean one is considered as well. Indeed, due to cultural and geographical reasons, Italy is described as the very center of this geopolitical area.²¹ It comes as no surprise for the Mediterranean Sea in Italy is traditionally called with the Latin name of *Mare Nostrum*²² since the ancient Rome. In the Ministry of Defense’s documents, the region is defined as the main area of national intervention²³ and is divided into five spheres: the EU member states, the Balkans, the Black Sea, the Mediterranean Middle-East and the Maghreb.²⁴ As many other European states, Italy seriously takes into consideration the Mediterranean basin, for this region is the source of many threats particularly as far as illegal migration and international terrorism are concerned.²⁵ Not

Doc/4/4_Prog_Elettorale.pdf

¹⁵ Barretta, Valerio; Tosiani, Romolo; Battiato, Marco; Fubini, Alice. #checkpolitiche2018 – Europa, I Punti Critici Dei Programmi – La Stampa // *La Stampa*. February 17, 2018. Mode of access: <http://www.lastampa.it/2018/02/17/italia/speciali/elezioni/2018/politiche/checkpolitiche2018/checkpolitiche-europa-i-punti-critici-dei-programmi-NMEjttNC3AVYO7faZEp9SK/pagina.html>

¹⁶ Salvini Premier – Programma Di Governo, 2018. Mode of access: https://www.salvinipremier.it/download/Programma_Lega-SalviniPremier_2018.pdf

¹⁷ Programma Elettorale Unitario Del Centro-Destra / Lega. Rome, 2018. Mode of access: http://dait.interno.gov.it/documenti/trasparenza/Doc/5/5_Prog_Elettorale.pdf

¹⁸ Hirschman, Albert Otto. *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organisations and States.* Mass. Harvard University Press; Cambridge, 1970. P. 162.

¹⁹ Documento Programmatico Pluriennale 2017-2019 / Italian Ministry of Defense. Rome, 2017. P. 10. Mode of access: https://www.difesa.it/Content/Documents/DPP/DPP_2017_2019_Approvato_light.pdf

²⁰ Leone, Vincenzo. *Il Pentagono E Le Basi Militari Usa in Italia/Atlante Geopolitico Treccani*. October 14, 2013. Mode of access: http://www.treccani.it/magazine/atlatne/geopolitica/Il_Pentagono_e_le_basi_militari_Usa_in_Italia.html

²¹ Libro Bianco per La Sicurezza Internazionale E La Difesa / Italian Ministry of Defense. Rome, 2017. P. 43. Mode of access: https://www.difesa.it/Primo_Piano/Documents/2015/04_Aprile/LB_2015.pdf

²² *Mare Nostrum = Our Sea*

²³ Libro Bianco per La Sicurezza Internazionale E La Difesa / Italian Ministry of Defense. Rome, 2017. P. 71. Mode of access: https://www.difesa.it/Primo_Piano/Documents/2015/04_Aprile/LB_2015.pdf

²⁴ *Ibid.* P. 44.

²⁵ Documento Programmatico Pluriennale 2017-2019 / Italian Ministry of Defense. Rome, 2017. P. 6. Mode of access: https://www.difesa.it/Content/Documents/DPP/DPP_2017_2019_Approvato_light.pdf

being possible to establish a system of regional security, Italy's aim at a general stabilization of the area. The Italian White Paper highlights the willingness of the country to become leading nation in certain international operations into the Mediterranean region. Particularly, where the direct knowledge of the scenario results to be relevant due to historical reasons. Even though they have not been directly mentioned, the influence into the former colonies result to be an important element for Italy's regional strategy.²⁶

In this framework, we can better understand certain maneuvers – not always consistent and forward-looking – that Italy has put in place into the Mediterranean chessboard. Starting from the former colony of Libya, the ill-advised regime change in 2011 has brought Italy to promote the UN-backed Government of National Accord led by Fayeز al-Sarraj. Furthermore, Italy has reached agreements with both the official al-Sarraj government and with paramilitary organizations led by his competitor Khalifa Haftar in order to decrease the migration flux from Libya to Italy.²⁷

Another example of Italian action in the Mediterranean area is the UNIFIL operation in Lebanon. In this context, Italy is contributing with some 1100 soldiers. Moreover, it is the leading country of the Western sector of the operation.²⁸

Thus, it is easy to understand that the Euro-Atlantic dimension and the Euro-Mediterranean one are two prominent factors in shaping Italian geopolitical code. Anyway, there is a third feature of Italian foreign policy that we need to take into account. The attitude to deal

and establish friendly relations with most of the international actors – particularly with the outsiders – is an outstanding feature, avoiding the most of the times Schmitt's political dualism between friends and enemies.²⁹

The friendly presence in Lebanon, lead us to consider this peculiarity. The academia defines Italy's attitude as "friendship diplomacy" that for instance brought Italy to be seen as a historically reliable country by many Arab countries and their leaders.³⁰ The Sigonella crisis in 1985 can be a useful example to this extent.

A part from the Arab world, the friendship diplomacy of Italy has been clear in other recent scenarios of global crisis. For instance, Renzi government strongly opposed the renewal of sanctions against the Russian Federation over the case of Crimea.³¹ Moreover, Matteo Renzi has been the first Western leader paying official visit in Teheran since the reaching of the Iran Deal and the end of the international embargo against the Islamic Republic.³²

Trying to sum up the results of our research, Italy seems to perceive itself as a reliable pillar of the Western world, loyal member of both the EU and NATO. The Atlantic dimension of its linkages with Americas is not related just with international agreements and collective security. Indeed, the three main Italian communities abroad – excluding those residing in Europe – are residing in the Argentina (783.190 citizens), Brazil (373.665 citizens) and US (247.990 citizens).³³ Tens of thousands of Italian passport

²⁶ Libro Bianco per La Sicurezza Internazionale E La Difesa / Italian Ministry of Defense. Rome, 2017. Mode of access: https://www.difesa.it/Primo_Piano/Documents/2015/04_Aprile/LB_2015.pdf

²⁷ Tomasetta, Lara. Minniti: 'In Libia Non Possiamo Evitare Di Fare Accordi Con Haftar E Sarraj.' // *The Post Internazionale*. September 27, 2017. Mode of access: <https://www.tpi.it/2017/09/27/accordi-italia-libia-haftar-sarraj-minniti/>

²⁸ Libano – UNIFIL Operazione 'Leonte' – Esercito Italiano / Italian Army Official Website. Mode of access: http://www.esercito.difesa.it/operazioni/operazioni_oltremare/Pagine/Libano-UNIFIL-Operazione-Leonte.aspx

²⁹ Schmitt, Carl. *The Concept of the Political*. Expanded. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007. P. 26.

³⁰ Pizzigallo, Matteo. Una Buona Politica Estera. Italia E Paesi Arabi. Studi E Ricerche. Bordeaux Edizioni, 2015.

³¹ Burchard, Hans Von Der; Eder, Florian. Renzi Blocks Smooth Extension of Russia Sanctions // *Politico*, October 12, 2015. Mode of access: <https://www.politico.eu/article/renzi-blocks-extension-russia-sanctions/>

³² Renzi a Teheran, È Il Primo Premier Occidentale Dopo Lo Stop Alle Sanzioni // *AskaneWS*. April 11, 2016. Mode of access: http://www.askanews.it/esteri/2016/04/11/renzi-a-teheran-è-il-primo-premier-occidentale-dopo-lo-stop-alle-sanzioni-top10_20160411_143256/

³³ Stastics Central Office – Italian Ministry of the Interior. Anagrafe Degli Italiani Residenti

holders, a figure that does not take into account the far broader framework of millions of Italo-Americans that are oversea. Thus, in the Atlantic area Italy has strong human, cultural and political tie from which it is difficult to overlook.

The other relevant geopolitical dimension – the Euro-Mediterranean one – Italy seems to be aware of its geographically strategic position as well as of its history of former colonial empire. Consistently tries to promote regional stability in order to pursue the national interest.

Finally yet importantly, we have highlighted how Italy almost never used the friend/enemy rhetoric, preferring to deal with the outsiders and promoting the image of a generally friendly country.

A Euro-Atlantic and Euro-Mediterranean country, with mainly regional interests to defend, loyal member of the Western geopolitical bloc but able to establish good diplomatic ties with the most of the relevant external actors. This seems to be the Italian geopolitical code, through which the *Belpaese* orientates itself in the world.

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ГЕОПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЙ КОД ИТАЛИИ

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<p>Информация о статье: <i>Поступила в редакцию:</i> 27 марта 2018 <i>Принята к печати:</i> 28 апреля 2018</p>	<p>Аннотация: Цель данного исследования – выявить основные особенности итальянского геополитического кода, то есть образ, отталкиваясь от которого данная страна идентифицирует себя в мире. Автор также доказывает, что Италия также сформировала свой собственный подход к международным отношениям. В работе учтены соответствующие события в истории Италии и особенности современной геополитической ориентации страны, которые отражены в официальных стратегических документах Италии. В частности делается вывод о том, что Италия по-прежнему опирается на позиционирование себя как страны-основателя ключевых региональных объединений. Тем не менее, конструктивный подход Италии к странам вне западных региональных блоков позволило Италии выступить в качестве надежного партнера со многими крупными мировыми державами, и даже теми, кто противопоставляет себя Западу.</p>
<p>Об авторе: магистр международных отношений (Европейские исследования), Свободный международный университет социальных наук, Италия e-mail: giovanbattista.varricchio@gmail.com</p>	
<p>Ключевые слова: Италия; геополитический код; атлантизм; Средиземноморье; дипломатия</p>	

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