

"Europe, obviously, does not exist. It is neither a continent nor a culture or a people or a story. It is not defined by a single border, by a fate or a common dream. There are on the other hand the Europeans, but they escape when we try to define more precisely what are meant to be ". As French economist Jacques Attali suggests in his work " Europe, Europa", , when we talk about Europe we opt for a conventional approach. The word "Europe" does not mean anything, also as geographical expression, actually, it is only the western part of the Eurasian continent. The word Europe makes sense only when we fill it with some meanings and nowadays it a term certainly rich in content, as it has become the key word in the debate within the political arena of member states. This phenomenon was clearly stressed with the high pick debate of the electoral campaign conducted by political parties during the last European Parliament's election, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of May. Today the debate involves not only political elites, but it also affects public opinion, as people become more and more aware of the consequences that European policies have on their lives. In the last decade, Europe, as a supranational decision maker, has been playing a leading role in policy making, particularly after the adoption of the common currency, the launch of a draft constitution in 2004 and the admission of ten new member states. Nonetheless this development, nowadays the European Union (Eu) is going through a period of a general consent's decline, especially among public opinion. According to the Eurobarometer surveys of 2005, the major support indexes of the European Union are falling. The shift of tasks from the national state to European institutions, following the adoption of the Euro, has become increasingly relevant. Europe has been more and more involved into those "tasks" that were exclusive competence of member states. This encroach on national territory together with the austerity policies implemented by the European Council can be considered two of the main reasons of this consent's downfall. This decline, in the last European parliament's elections has been stressed by the good electoral results achieved by euroskeptical parties

Strong signal of dissatisfaction had emerged before with the rejection of European Constitution in 2004, by France and the Netherlands, whose citizens vote against its approval. This event surely was very important to testify how European citizens feel with Europe, above all, considering that both France and Netherlands are founding members.

In light of this the Italian case is very interesting. Indeed, even after Maastricht treaty, Italy remains one of the countries with the highest level of approvals both among public opinion and political elites.

According to Antonio Varsori's definition, Italy is considered by other European partners, "the Cinderella of Europe". In other words the unruly student who fails to complete the tasks assigned. Further, considering the secondary role that Italy plays in European policy arena, the fervent pro-Europeanism expressed seems to be almost an anomaly.

The starting point of my dissertation has been exactly this "anomaly". I tried to work out the reasons behind Italian's unconditional europeism and to figure out whether it is really a kind of ideal and unconditional support, as claimed in historiography, or if there are other components at stake.

I did so by examining European integration from both political elite's and public opinion's points of view. Thus, I divide my work in two parts.

In the first chapter, I analyze the role played by Italian elite from the 40's until the entry in the European Monetary System in 1979. I start with the analysis of the years after the second world war, looking at the three main parties and their role in the restoration of the state. In addition, I place the construction of European community within the context of the Cold war, looking at how that conflict had influenced the European integration building process. We can see that, at the very beginning, European integration seemed to be an instrument placed by USA to stop the spread of communism. Regarding Italian political elite, we can talk about the so called "specious Europe" as in this period, the party in charge of power, Christian Democracy, used the integration to restore national economy and to regain legitimacy in the international environment. This legitimacy was lost since the defeat in the second world war.

In the second paragraph, I move into the analysis of the left centre government period. In this period, many important events occurred both from national and international points of view. After the Russian invasion of Poland, the alliance between the socialist party and the communist one broke up. Therefore, the former, headed by Nenni got closer and closer to Christian Democracy party, and finally, after several negotiations, socialists entered into the government's cabinet. In this period it was clear how the initiatives in favor of European integration, taken by the Italian ruling class, were closely related to its aspiration to rebuild the country. These events represented the reason why the European choice was also a result of the conflict between East and West. It is also very interesting to underline how the political class had focused his attention on the political integration, rather than on the economic one. The reason is that they were perfectly aware of the minor economy condition of Italy compared to other European partners. As a consequence of that they

called for a major political integration in order to gain the same decisional power of other member states in the European institutions.

In the third paragraph, then, I take into account the deep crisis lived by Italy during the 70's. I focus my attention on how Europe, in this case, has been fundamental to overcome the crisis. In this period social conflict exploded in Italy and the economic crisis led the Christian Democracy to look for an alliance with the communist party. The latter was seen as the only one able to reduce social conflict. Therefore the two main parties joined the so-called "Solidarity national government" in order to answer to the social conflict which turned into terrorism actions.

In the meantime, in Europe, namely in France, we saw the rise to power of De Gaulle. This character with his strong personality changed the balance created until that moment, trying to make the European integration process more autonomous from USA. Moreover, regarding these years, we have to remember the constitution of the European monetary system and the position taken by Italian ruling class. It was very difficult to take a position because: on the one hand there were not the right economic conditions to enter the system, on the other hand, the exclusion from the ESM would have meant the marginalization of Italy in European context. On this topic Communist party and Christian Democracy had opposite views. So when the prime minister Andreotti announced in parliament that Italy would have been part of the ESM, the alliance with the communist party started to crumble. The final division occurred with the question of euro missile. In all the paragraphs, a particular attention was given to the position of communist party and its evolution vis-à-vis Europe. At the beginning, indeed, the Communist party took a position of ideological opposition about European integration. This occurred in accordance with the communist party of the Soviet Union. After the signature of Rome treaty in 1957, and the initiation of the Europe common Market with its evident economic advantages, the communist party was compelled to change strategy. This was necessary because otherwise it would have risked to closedown. It accepted the existence of Europe, acknowledging its economic advantages but, at the meantime, harsh criticizing its structure, lack of democracy and its geographical extension. As time went by, the communist party became aware that Europe could become an instrument to use as it started to detach itself from the Russian Communist party. So it assumed a more favourable position vis-à-vis Europe and its autonomous and neutral place in respect to the west/east conflict. Its relationship with Europe will be very contradictory until 1989, with the fall of Berlin's wall and the collapse of communism system.

Finally, in the last paragraph, I analyze the reaction of the public opinion about Europe in the period after Maastricht treaty. In this first stage, the consensus was mainly political given that the economic benefits of the integration were not relevant yet. The consensus at the beginning was mainly caused by the fear of Russia's threats and the good feelings towards the USA. Only during the 60's and 70's, when the economic advantages had started to emerge, the consensus became more economical, even if the political component remained very strong.

In the second chapter I went into the 80's. I start with the examination of the Single European Act of 1986 and how the Italian ruling class and the different parties debated on this event and its economic consequences. Then I move into the examination of the first republic's collapse, and the formation of new political parties looking at their position respect to European integration. I pay particular attention to the communist party and the way in which it radically changes its view and position concerning Europe. Finally I analyze the position of public opinion after Maastricht, looking at the reasons of the decline of the consensus and stressing the peculiarity and uniqueness of Italian Europeanism.

In the first paragraph, I present a vision of the most important events occurred between the creation of the European monetary system and the signature of the Single European Act, focusing on the positions taken by the ruling class vis-à-vis the Single European Act and the Maastricht Treaty

The admission to the European monetary system (ESM) and the parliamentary debate on the missiles once again confirms Italy's loyalty to the Atlantic's values. Europeanism still seemed to be closely related to Atlantism and the neutralist strategy of the Communist Party, to create an autonomous Europe out of the 2 blocks, appeared to fail. In domestic policy, Craxi's rise to power happened while the communist party was experiencing a downfall of consents largely caused by the change in the international climate. In England the neo-liberal conservative Margaret Thatcher rose to power while in the USA the republican Reagan. This change of leadership towards a conservative direction led to an escalation of the East-West conflict.

At the end of the 90s the process of convergence with the Maastricht criteria led to the entrance into the third stage of European Economic Monetary Union. The implementation of these parameters was a necessary condition for the admission to the single currency. The latter implied the acceptance of many consequences within the policy of the member states. Indeed it resulted in a cession of power in terms of sovereignty from the national state to the European institutions. Until 1996 the implementation of Maastricht policies, for political

actors, it meant essentially to take advantage of the flexibility allowed by the Treaty. During the '97 and '98 the climate and the increasingly pressing issue of entry into the single currency from the outset it became essential for the new center-left government headed by Roman Prodi. Looking at these important events occurred between the 80's and the 90's , it was very interesting to focus on strategies in the European policy of integration lined by the Italian ruling class. Indeed Italy seemed to be victim of its own Europeanism. The Italian ruling class continued to profess a blind loyalty to Europeanism, without being able to implement the European policies. As a consequence of that Italy on one hand seemed to encourage European integrations, but, on the other, it did not seem concerned with the concrete aspect of policies implementation.

In the second paragraph, I move on into the analysis of the uncritical Europeanism taken by the heir of the Communist party. In this section, I saw how the Communist Party, under the influence of both internal and external pressures, adopted a position of “uncritical Europeanism” . Furthermore I look at the consequences this assumption led to. Even though after 1979 ,the Communist Party no longer voted against the most part of European choices, its relationship with Europe remained characterized by ideological intrinsic contradiction. Despite the progressive estrangement from the position of the Soviet communist party after Prague's event, the Communist party was linked to it from the economic point of view until 1989, when USSR definitely collapsed. During the 80s and 90s the party lived a crisis of identity, as it became aware of the impracticability of welfare policies promoted. On the one hand it tried protect itself and its features, by proclaiming its difference and uniqueness from an ideological point of view. On the other hand, because of the international situation and the spread of the new doctrine of neoliberalism, it was compelled to open to the other parties and to converge towards the ideals of Socialism. The Italian communist party changed its name in Democratic party of the left, so removing the Communist adjective. Moreover, we can see while renewing its identity, it also changed some important traditional features. First it changed the relationship between internationalism and national sovereignty in favour of the former. Then, above all, it was obliged to relinquish its traditional welfare's state policy, because of the economic crisis prevented the parties to implement this kind of policies. In light of this, we can identify the adoption of Maastricht treaty as the officially starting point of this “uncritical” phase of the left regarding Europe, with the definitive acceptance of Capitalism, Economy market and the relinquishment of some fundamental characteristics of the old party.

In the third paragraph, I focus on the parties which came out after the fall of the first republic and their positions respect to European Union. The position of Italian elite in European institutions, from the 90s ahead, can be defined as a place of acquiescence. The political class seemed to accept almost passively European policies, in the absence of alternatives. The Italian case is a very special one, indeed although Italy was one of the founders states, it has always had little influence, despite its longstanding commitment to support political integration. During the signature of the Maastricht's treaty, Italy experienced a period of deep crisis that led to the end of the first republic and the birth of a new political system. After the the so called "transition phase"(1989-1994) the political system that has emerged was radically changed.. The crisis of the Communist Party clearly had an impact also on Christian Democracy, whose unity was guaranteed in part by the anti-communist struggle. In this second phase, Italy started to express criticism about the work of the Commission. In the decade immediately following the Maastricht Treaty, three different political cycles reflecting the position of the Italian Government regarding European institutions, can be identified: the recovery phase, the phase of full membership and detachment phase. With Amato and Ciampi's governments, between '92 and '94, there were a number of efforts to comply with integration parameters. Then with Berlusconi's government of '94, there were a stopping phase of the integration process due to the presence, into the coalition, of parties such as the Lega Nord and AN. With the victory of Prodi in '96, we came into a phase of full membership and important results were achieved under the economic point of view. These results allowed Italy to join the European Monetary Union (EMU) from its outset. In 2000 Berlusconi pursued a phase of soft Euro-skepticism. We can say, without any doubts, that the 90s were characterized by a left-center Euro-enthusiastic and a right-center that was most Euro-skeptical. In '96, however, the index of support for the political elite Italian attitude towards Europe is very high, and second only to Spain. The consensus seemed to decline after the Treaty of Amsterdam in '97 and Nice in 2001. Or better said, the consensus on integration remained high, what declined is the consensus on specific issues. This change of attitude according to the analysis conducted by some authors was originated by the practical impact of European policies on Italian economy.

Another very important factor in the orientation of the elites, according to the analysis of Cotta, is the position of government or opposition interpreted by the parties. Indeed the position of government seemed to alleviate a lot of Euro-skepticism. The differences between the left-center and the right-center are still quite relevant, and these alterations

lied mainly on the vision that the two sides have of Europe. The center had an intergovernmental vision and it assumed a defensive attitude towards Europe, because it felt the national identity threatened. This vision was opposed to the one of a supranational Europe, supported by the left-center according to which Italy receives only benefits from Europe. A very interesting fact that emerged from the studies of Cotta, is that the support and trust on European Union are not directly related. Indeed, if both the coalitions gave positive results in terms of support, these took different positions vis-à-vis the confidence towards European institutions: the right-center proved to be much more suspicious. In the support given by Northern League and AN, one may well see a utilitarian dimension that the European support to national interests. What I conclude is that both sides were using European proposing and its political interpretation as an external constraint, in order to justify their policies.

Finally, I focus my attention on the change occurred in the consensus of Italian's public opinion after Maastricht's treaty. The decade elapsed between the signing of the Treaty and the entry in the EMU was a period full of events for Italy. Its entry into the EMU resulted into enormous costs and sacrifices for Italian citizens. In light of this, it was interesting to see how, according to a Euro-barometer survey in 1999, Italian public opinion still strongly supported European integration.

According to the surveys which I take into account, we can say certainly that, after Maastricht, the emotional support declined. Furthermore it was partially replaced by a critical evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages that European policies brought. Despite this, however, political support remained a very important component, and it guided mainly the orientation of the majority of Italians towards the EU. The gap between common and particular support increased when Italian began to be concerned about the consequences the entrance into the market would led but this did not generate any kind of opposition. The peculiarity lied on the fact that these fears were generated primarily by political concerns, rather than economic ones. Indeed Italians looked at Europe as an instrument of political stability, more than a source of economic benefits. As in 1952, political consensus came back to be an important component in the Italian support to the EU, this reduced (most from) the distrust of Italians regarding their political élites, so they committed to Europe the reform of Italian system. As in that year, the support to European integration was based on political reasons, but while before political reasons looking at external factors, such as the threaten of USSR, now they are looking at internal factors, the instability of the internal political system.

