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The British-Italian partnership for COP26: Diplomatic process and political implications

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Abstract:

This research will focus on the upcoming 26th *United Nations Climate Change Conference* (COP26), which will be presided jointly by the United Kingdom and Italy in November 2021, after a one year postponement following the global disruptions that have been brought about by the *Covid-19* pandemic; our goal is to envision the partnership between the two above-mentioned countries as a bilateral effort, to try and address the main issues within what is substantially a multilateral setting in and of itself, namely *global Climate Diplomacy*. The introduction is aimed at highlighting the more pressing current difficulties in the realm of Climate Diplomacy negotiations, as well as to briefly recount the contemporary evolution of the latter within the wider diplomatic context. The first chapter will then present a brief historical background related to Climate Diplomacy, prior to highlighting the key points in the diplomatic path that led to the above-mentioned U.K.\Italy COP26 partnership.

We will then go on to argue that, given the current international climate diplomacy scenario, in which the two largest emitters of *Greenhouse Gases* (namely the United States and China, which together account for more than 40% of global emissions), refuse to take the lead in limiting the rise in global temperatures to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, as the 2015 Paris Agreement envisioned; the most feasible and perhaps the only plausible solution is that of an ambitious coalitional effort, in which the U.K. and Italy, through their joint hosting of the COP26 Conference and related ministerial meetings, subsidiary bodies meetings and related events, as well as their upcoming *G7* and *G20* Presidencies respectively, take on the role of *Leadiators* in pursuing the establishment and nurturing of a coalition of willing actors wide enough as to possess the capabilities to achieve the necessary long-term positive results.

Later on, we will introduce the context of post-Brexit bilateral relations between the two countries: our argument here relies on the examination of the extent to which the joint diplomatic efforts, particularly in the realm of Climate Diplomacy through COP26, as well as *G7-G20* Summitry, might account for the shaping of future short and medium term relations between the two countries; also, we want to explore the possibilities that a tighter and more comprehensive relation between their governments and diplomatic communities might entail, all the more so in the still uncertain legal and geopolitical context that the historic withdrawal of the U.K. from the European Union is likely to bring about.

Keywords: *Climate Diplomacy ; Paris Agreement ; Conference of the Parties ; Group of Two ; Multilateral process ; Coalition-building ; Covid-19 ; Brexit ; “Leadiation”*.

Introduction and Context:

For several years now, keywords such as *climate* and *environment* have ascended to a role of prominence not only in the public eye and of society at large, especially (one might say unsurprisingly) with regards to the youth, but also in the international diplomatic agenda. In the proceedings of International Summitry or bilateral meetings, be it among Prime Ministers, Ministers of Foreign Affairs or Environment Ministers, such issues have come to occupy an increasingly central position; as well as representing a major factor to account for citizen' mobilization throughout the globe. Perhaps a positive spill-over of the third globalization is the emergence of a world-wide, diffused sense of urgency regarding these matters. The latter is only natural, in my opinion, being environmental challenges of such a nature as to require long-standing, concerted supranational efforts in order to realistically be able to tackle them successfully.

Not only that, as several recent studies, many of which taking a clue from the latest edition of the much influential work of Joseph Nye on *soft power*¹, have shown: commitment to the so-called *Climate Action* has progressively become a yardstick, and a significant one at that, of a country's gravity in the international scenario^{2 3}: the United Nations especially epitomize this concept, whereby motions and initiatives related to either specific or principle-guided climate objectives have proliferated in the last few decades, undoubtedly inspired by goodwill, but equally undoubtedly aimed at increasing one's prestige and soft power.

One might say that pledges related to cutting carbon emissions or resources poured in adaptation and mitigation projects represent today what contributing to peacekeeping operations or conflict mediation represented some thirty or twenty years ago, in the right proportions of course. To that extent, "borderline" developing countries such as China, India or Brazil have only recently begun to develop a societal (perhaps not yet corporate) and thus, to a certain degree, political sensibility toward environmental protection concerns; proof of this being the lengths many of these countries have gone in hosting important international

¹ Nye, J. (2009). "*Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*". *Public Affairs*, April 2009.

² Heng, Y.Q. (2014) "*Beyond 'kawaii' pop culture: Japan's normative soft power as global trouble-shooter*". *The Pacific Review*, 27:2, pp. 169-192.

³ Aşkar Karakır, I. (2018). "*Environmental Foreign Policy as a Soft Power Instrument: Cases of China and India*". *Journal of Contemporary Eastern Asia*, pp. 5-26.

conferences and events on the subject of climate change, surely aware of the benefits these can generate⁴.

However, notwithstanding the strategic and political positives connected with climate action highlighted above, the reality of the situation is more complicated and multifaceted than that, especially when considering the “heavyweights” emitters: as for the United States, as early as March 2001, the G.W. Bush Jr. administration rejected the above-mentioned 1997 *Kyoto Protocol*, which was signed on by the then U.S. President W. Clinton. Furthermore, already during the Obama presidency, notwithstanding the ratification of the 2015 *Paris Agreement* by the U.S., proposals for a national emission *cap-and-trade* system had, in practice, remained dead letter in the Senate.

This is because votes in the U.S. Senate are not weighted by population, but equally distributed among the 50 states, therefore it is usually the case that the interests of those less densely populated, carbon-dependent states manage to impose their will in a disproportionate fashion⁵. Not only that, in June 2017, current U.S. President Donald Trump declared his intention to withdraw from the *Paris Agreement* altogether: such withdrawal is due to formally take place on November 4, 2020. Needless to say, efforts to tackle hazardous climate change would prove difficult at best without any substantive contribution from actors such as the United States Federal Government.

The other major contributor to greenhouse gases (GHG) emission, namely China, faces perhaps even tighter internal constraints than its Western counterpart: despite the notable energetic efficiency objectives and the transition from coal initiated a decade ago (albeit a difficult one as the carbon consumptions is estimated to peak around 2030)⁶, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has wagered its political legitimacy on the creation of an expanding middle class and on growing standards of living, which in turn make acceptance of international environmental commitments that pose even the slightest risk of negatively

⁴ Circolo di Studi Diplomatici, Rome: Diplomatic Dialogue n. 247: “*La sfida dei cambiamenti climatici e dei mutamenti nella biodiversità: loro implicazioni geopolitiche*”. April 2020, pp. 3.

⁵ Broz, J.L. and Maliniak, D. (2010). “*Malapportionment, Gasoline Taxes, and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*”, presented at the Third Annual Conference on The Political Economy of International Organizations, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., January 28 -30, 2010.

⁶ <https://coaltransitions.org/publications/coal-transition-in-china/>

impacting the country's remarkable GDP growth records over a certain threshold, politically unacceptable to the country's political élite as a whole.

The situation depicted above has been a reality for at least two decades, as many observers and political scientists have argued: whilst there surely are foreseeable benefits in developing greener technologies now, the short-term costs remain unacceptably high politics-wise, both concerning Chinese autocrats and American elected officials. Also, internal blockages in the two countries contribute to reinforcing each other's: the U.S. has repeatedly stated its refusal of any deal not involving large developing countries such as China; from its viewpoint, the latter rebuts, also through a careful dialectic of developing countries' solidarity and Western unfairness, by arguing that it won't budge unless the U.S. (which has a per capita GHG emission rate fourfold that of China) does first⁷.

The concept of a *Group of Two (G-2)* was first created by notable economist C. F. Bergsten, who, in 2009, argued the following: China is poised to surpass Japan to become the second largest economy on the planet; the U.S. and China account for almost half of global growth; they are the two largest trading nations and they are the two largest emitters of GHG; they are the single largest debtor and creditor countries respectively; they are the leaders of the high-income industrialized countries and emerging\developing countries respectively⁸. Whilst having many advocates and having been widely discussed, there still isn't any full-fledged definition of *G-2*: according to notable realist political scientist Zbigniew Brzezinski, it describes the current reality; former British Foreign Secretary David Miliband argued, some ten years ago, that something like a *G-2* could emerge in the foreseeable future, he also proposed E.U. interaction as to create a potential *G-3*, comprised of the U.S., China and the European Union⁹.

Having said all of the above, it would be foolish to think that any deal not involving the U.S. or China at all, (be it their official governments or other entities) which taken together represent almost half of the world's greenhouse gases (GHG) emissions, could be worth the effort to strike it: the fact of the matter is that the reality of domestic politics in both countries make effective and ambitious governmental *G-2* leadership on the subject very unlikely.

⁷ Hale, T. (2011). "*A Climate Coalition of the Willing*". Center for Strategic and International Studies; The Washington Quarterly 34:1, pp. 89-101.

⁸ Bergsten, C.F. (2009). "*Two's Company*". Magazine of Foreign Affairs, September 2009.

⁹ Miliband, D. (2009). Asian Times, May 29th, 2009.

Moreover, not only do the G-2 represent the most glaring and crucial barrier to an ambitious global response to climate change, it must also be said that they provide, albeit indirectly, a practical excuse for other governments not to take concrete action. In fact, regarding the Paris COP21, the *Nationally Determined Contributions* (NDC) provided by most countries fell short of the initial ambitions and expectations: all of the above, observers argue, makes it only fair to refer to the Paris Agreement as to an initial step towards more ambitious undertakings¹⁰.

¹⁰ Clemencon, R. (2016). “*The Two Sides of the Paris Climate Agreement: Dismal Failure or Historic Breakthrough?*”. The Journal of Environment & Development. February 10, 2016.

Chapter 1: The Conference of The Parties to the UNFCCC

1.1 Brief historical background

After having highlighted a *modicum* of background related to the recent developments in climate diplomacy, the aim of the first chapter of this research is to briefly recount the history of the main steps the world has taken in environmental negotiations and governance so far; as well as to describe and explain the diplomatic process that led to the partnership between the U.K. and Italy in their successful bid to host the COP26 Conference, the subsequent process that established the international calendar of meetings and the wide host of preparatory events leading up to the Conference (originally scheduled to be held in November 2020), up to the abrupt hiatus forced upon all of us by the landmark event that has so far epitomized 2020, namely the *Covid-19* global pandemic. Furthermore, we want to analyse what have been the main drivers of such diplomatic momentum, as well as understanding what are the goals for each of the parties involved and what could be the outcomes of the afore-mentioned diplomatic process.

The story of environmental negotiations and the various undertakings of those involved in the latter, be it public or private actors, is a relatively recent one: one could argue that it does not go back more than some 40-odd years, starting with the rudimentary 1972 *Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment*. At the 21st *United Nations Climate Change Conference*, commonly referred to as COP21, held in Paris from November 30 to December 12, 2015, the Parties to the 1992 *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (UNFCCC) and signatories to the 1992 *Rio Declaration*, as well as to the 1997 *Kyoto Protocol* produced at COP3, adopted the so-called *Paris Agreement*, a new legally-binding framework for a globally coordinated endeavour to combat harmful climate change¹¹. The Agreement represented at the time the end-goal of six years of strenuous environmental negotiations under the patronage of the UNFCCC, reached under a good deal of scepticism and intense international pressure to avoid a failure similar to that of the *Copenhagen Conference* in 2009¹².

¹¹ United Nations Treaty Collection. July 8, 2016.

¹² Müller, B. (2010). "*Copenhagen 2009: Failure or final wake-up call for our leaders?*". Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, February 2010.

Put succinctly, The COP is the chief decision-making body of the UNFCCC. All States which are parties to the Convention are represented at the COP, which meets every year since 1995. The main functions of the COP are to review and examine the inventories and NDC's submitted by the parties, as well as using such degree of information to assess the progress made by the Convention based on the contributions and measures taken by the parties. As per U.N. tradition, Parties are gathered into five regional groups: the *African group*; the *Asian group*; the *Eastern European group*; the *Latin America and the Caribbean States group* and the *Western European and Other States group*. The regional groups, however, are not usually representative of the interests of Parties, therefore several other groupings arose, which are more indicative of actual negotiation patterns.

For example, Developing countries generally fall into the *G-77 + China* group (which also incorporates other groups such as the *African Group*, the *Small Island Developing States* and the *Least Developed Countries* groups); the *Arab States* group is a collection of Muslim countries; the *Umbrella Group* is a coalition formed after the adoption of the *Kyoto Protocol*; the *EU27* Countries are generally represented by the Party which holds the Presidency of the *Council of Ministers*; the *BASIC* group, which comprises China, South Africa, Brazil and India; the *Like-Minded* group; the *Coalition for Rainforest Nations*, and many more¹³.

The Paris Agreement is arguably the international treaty most dependent on strong and concrete global cooperation: it requires governmental and non-governmental entities to actively support each other in the quest to fulfil the goal established by the Agreement, namely to keep global average air temperatures 2° Celsius below pre-industrial levels; on that basis, the relevant actors are called to adopt ever-ambitious emission reduction targets.

To that goal, the Agreement defined a mechanism of *Nationally Determined Contributions* (NDC) that each signatory should communicate to the *Secretariat*, that is because the rationale of the Paris Agreement is related to processes rather than fixed mitigation and adaptation goals, which is also consistent with the above-mentioned trend of environmental protection as an effective soft power instrument. The Agreement poses a preamble dedicated to the different positions of countries with regards to their polluting power and factor endowments, hence their responsibilities: enshrined in the principles of *common but differentiated responsibilities* and *respective capabilities in light of different circumstances*

¹³ <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/parties-non-party-stakeholders/parties/party-groupings>

(Art. 2.2).¹⁴ The Paris Agreement has formally entered into force on November 4, 2016; as of 2020, 195 parties have ratified the document.

1.2 The envisioning and formulation of the Anglo-Italian partnership for COP26

It is in such troubled international Climate Diplomacy context, highlighted in the introduction, that we come to the United Kingdom-Italy COP26 partnership: As of December 2019, the United Kingdom, in partnership with Italy, succeeded in an ambitious bid for the Presidency of the next *Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change*, commonly referred to as COP26; to say that the U.K. has strongly advocated for its presidency of the Conference also in light of geopolitical concerns about its post-Brexit international position isn't at all far-fetched in my opinion.

Indeed, many notable observers alluded to the same concept, such as in a recent article from the *British Foreign Policy Group*: “Taking a lead on the pressing issues of the day can give Britain an important role as a convener on foreign policy debates, and help us establish a position as a link between different parts of the world – from Europe to the United States and the Commonwealth. By making climate diplomacy, and climate aid, a defining feature of a forward-looking foreign policy, the UK can not only tone down the hypocrisy that has marred the debate, but also carve out important relationships as it moves beyond Brexit”.¹⁵

Despite such considerations, it is important to mention that both the U.K. and Italy have been on the forefront of Climate Diplomacy since the issue of hazardous climate change was first acknowledged: the latter occurred in 1972, through the *Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment*, which recognized the responsibility of human action on the climate. More importantly, they were both protagonists in the 1992 *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development*, the first document to effectively raise awareness on the subject of climate change, as well as to lay down the environmental principles by which the international community should from then on abide, notable examples among the 27 principles contained in the text are the *Precautionary Principle* and the *Polluter Pays Principle*. Moreover, both countries have significantly contributed to mould the several European Union commitments

¹⁴ 19th Session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC, International Institute for Sustainable Development. Archived from the original on 2013-02-13.

¹⁵ <https://bfp.org.uk/2020/01/how-can-the-uk-lead-on-climate-diplomacy/>

on the subject so far, both are active members of the *High Ambition Coalition*, as well as having endorsed the *Statement on Stepping Up for Climate Ambition* at COP24.

The proposal for the above-mentioned U.K.\Italy partnership for COP26 was first announced on June 18th, 2019, through a joint statement summarizing the gist of their bid for the presidency: “The United Kingdom and Italy have today agreed to present a proposal for the UK to assume the Presidency of the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in partnership with Italy. Building on previous proposals, the UK offers to host the COP and Italy the pre-COP events. The UK and Italy have a proven track-record of working together to champion the need for urgent climate action globally and have both played a key role in shaping ambitious European Union commitments to meet the Paris Agreement”.¹⁶

According to the proposal, within the Pre-COP Ministerial Meeting, Italy is going to host several preparatory events and a significant youth event (*Youth4Climate*), in recognition of the disproportionate impact that climate change will have on young people and future generations. The U.K. and Italy jointly stated their commitment to encourage the highest degree of ambition through COP26, as well as to bring about the necessary momentum required to “unleash the full potential of the Paris Agreement”. The partnership is meant to form the cornerstone of a wider partnership to grapple with climate change and to deliver on ambitious *Climate Action* through the UK-Italy COP26 partnership, the *UN Climate Action Summit* in September 2019, COP25 in December and the upcoming British G7 Presidency and Italian G20 Presidency in 2021.

On that occasion, British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt said: “Today, through great joint diplomacy, we have agreed a bid for a UK COP26 Presidency in partnership with our friends in Italy. Together, through our continued commitment to work across Europe and internationally, we will build a better world for our children”. The Italian Minister for the Environment, Land and Sea Protection, Sergio Costa, added: “This partnership between Italy and the UK sends a strong signal of determined and informed cooperation on climate change, which is a theme that requires a change of paradigm and which will dominate our agenda and that of future generations”.

¹⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-cop26-presidency-bid-in-partnership-with-italy>

1.3 Diplomatic Process detailing the Anglo-Italian partnership for COP26

In order to better understand such proposal, it is important to state that the level of ambition of the two countries with regard to climate action is not to be underestimated: well in advance of the above mentioned joint statement, on March 29th, 2019, the British Minister of State for the Commonwealth and the UN, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, declared in a statement at the UN General Assembly *Climate and Sustainable Development for All Summit* in New York: “the UK fully supports the urgent need for action. We must work together; we must pool our resources and draw on the best of human ingenuity to tackle this incredible challenge [...] the United Kingdom has offered to host COP26 in 2020. If our bid is successful, let me assure all of you that we will bring to bear the full weight of our expertise, the full weight our influence and our ambition together. We will bring civil society, the private sector, governments and every expert on the planet together to encourage a spirit of shared enterprise; and we will set challenging goals that reflect the different global priorities [...] the greatest threat we face today is not climate change itself. It is inaction in the face of that threat. The time for delay is in the past”¹⁷.

Such heartfelt statement was echoed, less than three months later, by an announcement in Parliament from the then British PM Theresa May, laying down the statutory instrument regarding the proceedings to amend the 2008 *Climate Change Act*, reformulating U.K.’s environmental legislation, introducing the commitment to reach *net-zero* emissions by 2050. Later that month, at the G20 Summit in Osaka, the then tenant of 10 Downing St. stated: “The facts, which are clear, should guide us: we are running out of time to act. We need a fivefold increase on existing 2030 commitments to remain below 1.5° Celsius degrees of warming [...] These next few years are critical. This is why tackling this crisis has become such a high priority for the UK. And it is why we have offered to preside over COP26, in partnership with Italy”¹⁸.

The resignation of Theresa May later that summer and the appointment of Boris Johnson as Prime Minister did not halt the environmental commitments of the U.K., nor did it affect the

¹⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-time-to-act-is-now>

¹⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-theresa-may-we-will-end-uk-contribution-to-climate-change-by-2050>

workings of the partnership with Italy regarding COP26: in a telephone call with Italian PM Giuseppe Conte, on August 1st, 2019, PM Johnson reiterated his commitment to the bid for the COP26 Conference, as well as “strengthening the partnership between the UK and Italy as we prepare to leave the EU, including our economic ties”, he also reassured his Italian counterpart of the post-Brexit rights of Italian nationals in the United Kingdom¹⁹.

Another notable development came on September 16th, not by chance, since the date coincided with the *World Ozone Day*: the British cabinet introduced a new online system for businesses, designed to maintain current E.U. restrictions on the emissions of fluorinated gases despite the upcoming Brexit. This was part of the ambitious work designed to ensure the support of the E.U. to UK’s and Italy’s bid to host COP26. Sure enough, the latter, coupled with the above-mentioned 2050 *net-zero* target and the reiteration of the two countries’ commitments during the G7 Summit held in Biarritz from August 24th to 26th, translated into the formal backing of the international community to the Anglo-Italian hosting of COP26 in 2020, expected to be officially ratified and announced at the COP25 Summit in December 2019 (at the time still scheduled to be held in Santiago de Chile).

British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab welcomed the news: “The UK has just received a huge vote of confidence from our international partners. We are poised to host the next major global climate negotiations, in partnership with Italy. Over 30,000 delegates from around the world will come together to commit to ambitious action to tackle climate change”. Therefore, with the official confirmation due in December, the U.K. and Italy already started drawing plans and making preparations: in a dedicated website, the two governments issued a joint statement to clarify their intentions in view of the COP25 Conference in Madrid (replacement venue for Santiago de Chile): “The UK is set to host the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow, with Italy hosting a number of key preparatory events such as the Youth4Climate Event and the Pre-COP Summit: fully committed to the principles of the UN, our partnership will focus on promoting tangible action”.

Furthermore, the website highlighted the previous commitments that tie the two countries together in their environmental efforts: the U.K. and Italy are both members of the *Powering*

¹⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-call-with-prime-minister-conte-of-italy-1-august-2019>

Past Coal Alliance and together, they have committed to phase out coal power by 2025; also, as members of the *High Ambition Coalition*, both countries also pledged to achieve *net-zero* emissions by 2050; moreover, they have worked closely in the context of G7 and G20 summitry to build resilience and unlock sustainable finance, for example in the context of personal mobility, with both countries introducing notable economic incentives for the purchasing of hybrid and electric vehicles: in addition, the UK and Italy hold the upcoming G7 and G20 Presidencies respectively, which could enhance such synergies even more.

In the proposed bid presented by the U.K., Glasgow had been chosen as the UK city to host the major UN climate change summit. Claire Perry, former *Minister for Energy and Clean Growth* and named the UK nominated President for COP26 by the Prime Minister, said: “In 2020, world leaders will come together to discuss how to tackle climate change on a global scale – and where better to do so than Glasgow: As one of the UK’s most sustainable cities, with a record for hosting high-profile international events, I welcome the nomination from our partners in the UN regional group to host COP26 in Glasgow in partnership with Italy”.

Moreover, the partnership between the U.K. and Italy for COP26 was further strengthened by the 27th *Pontignano Conference*, perhaps the most traditional annual appointment on the British-Italian agenda, organised by the *British Council*, the UK’s international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities, and the *British Embassy in Italy*, in collaboration with *Siena University* and *St. Antony’s College*, Oxford. During the conference, held in September, from 26th to 28th, the British Ambassador to Italy, Jill Morris, said: “This edition will focus on the key global challenges we are both facing, in the name of centuries of friendship and partnership between Italy and the United Kingdom. Global strategic challenges and the role of the United Kingdom and Italy, including in the multilateral context. We are allies, and as such we work together on a daily basis in the UN, the G7, the G20, and NATO. This conference will also be a great opportunity to develop solid foundations for a productive collaboration in view of COP26, which we are pleased to organise in cooperation with Italy”²⁰.

The 2019 *Pontignano Conference* came just weeks before Parliament workings started in the U.K. regarding a new *Environment Bill*, which was devised to ensure maintenance of the

²⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/27th-pontignano-conference-navigating-the-new-world>

EU's environmental protection standards as the U.K. prepared to leave the Union; as well as enshrining in domestic law the several environmental principles of the latter. Moreover, provisions were envisaged to foster binding legal effect on all environmental targets the UK had committed to prior to that moment, also establishing an ad-hoc *Office for Environmental Protection*, aimed at enforcing action and analysing complaints on the subject.

Meanwhile, the newly appointed Italian *Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation*, Luigi di Maio, during a Parliamentary hearing with Senate and Chamber of Deputies Commissions gathered, on November 13th, delivered his view on the COP26 Conference: "We will uphold the commitment to the transition towards sustainable production and consumption models, in line with our objective: reduce CO2 emissions throughout the economy. This is why we have committed, together with the United Kingdom, to ensure a high degree of ambition within COP26. [...] The themes of global governance, such as the fight against hazardous climate change and the prevention of natural disasters, constitute central priorities, also in light of the G20 presidency that Italy will assume in December 2020. We are poised to ensure an ambitious and concrete G20 leadership"[...].²¹

Furthermore, as to echo Minister Di Maio, Vice Minister Emanuela Del Re, in her speech during the session on 2030 objectives at the G20 *Ministerial Meeting* in Nagoya, on November 23rd, declared: "Italy, with the recent reductions in climate altering emissions, coupled with its renewable sources production, is more than in line with the EU objectives for 2020 and looking ahead at the next decade, we will certainly go above that, ensuring growth and protecting the environment".²²

After the official ratification of the U.K.-Italy bid for the Presidency of COP26, which came at the COP25 Conference (moved from Santiago de Chile to Madrid for security concerns) in December 2019, the organization chart for many of the relevant posts in view of the Conference started becoming clearer: on January 16th, U.K. PM Boris Johnson appointed the outgoing *Bank of England* Governor Mark Carney as the Prime Ministers' *Finance Adviser*

²¹ XVIII Legislatura, Commissioni Riunite (III Camera e 3a Senato): Resoconto stenografico, Seduta n. 7, mercoledì, 13 novembre, 2019.

²² https://www.esteri.it/mae/it/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/comunicati 23 novembre, 2019.

for COP26. This appointment must be viewed as complementing Mr. Carney’s position of UN *Special Envoy for Climate Action and Finance*, which was first announced in December.

Also, Nigel Topping, former Executive Director of the *Carbon Disclosure Project Worldwide*, in their own words: “an organisation based in the United Kingdom which supports companies and cities to disclose the environmental impact of major corporations” and CEO of *We Mean Business*, a joint effort by private corporations to accelerate a clean energy transition²³, was appointed, on January 23rd, as *High Level Climate Action Champion* in view of the COP26 Conference. The post was created in 2015 at the COP21 Conference, to foster action from private enterprises, *Non-Governmental Organizations* (NGO), municipal and regional governments, as well as to coordinate such work with the parties to the UNFCCC. The office is held for two years and every newly appointed Champion is meant to work alongside the former.

1.4 The establishment of the COP26 organigram and the Covid-19 outbreak

Another development came on January 31st, as the Cabinet announced the removal of Claire Perry O’Neill as COP26 President, through a communique that stated: “The Prime Minister is grateful to Claire for her work preparing for what will be a very successful and ambitious climate change summit in Glasgow in November. Preparations will continue at pace for the summit, and a replacement will be confirmed shortly. Going forward, this will be a ministerial role”. O’Neill was appointed COP26 president in July; she would have been the first COP president not to hold any ministerial position.

Shortly after, on February 4th, PM Boris Johnson, together with Italy’s PM Giuseppe Conte officially launched the COP26 partnership at the *Science Museum* in London, joined by Sir David Attenborough, as advocate and patron for the Conference; the Prime Ministers will lead the discussion on tackling hazardous climate change as part of the larger global alliance which makes up COP26²⁴. Furthermore, on February 24th, the meeting of the *Convention on Biological Diversity* (CBD) will be held in Rome, ahead of the *Biodiversity Summit* (COP15), with the objective to put in place a new system for the preservation of the global flora and

²³ <https://www.cdp.net/en/info/about-us>

²⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-meeting-with-prime-minister-conte-of-italy-4-february-2020>

wildlife. The event also served as a kick-starter for the so-called *Year of Climate Action*, with events due to take place across the United Kingdom and Italy.

“2020 must be the decisive year in the fight against climate change and science is our greatest ally in this”, said Premier Conte, citing Italy’s commitment to implement a national plan aimed at achieving carbon neutrality. PM Johnson said that hosting COP26 is an important opportunity for the nations of the world to accelerate the fight against climate change: “As we draw up our plans this year for the ambitious objective of zero emissions by 2050, we call upon others to join us, we must make 2020 a year of turnaround for global warming, the year in which we choose a future that is cleaner and greener for everyone”.

Also, on February 13th, PM Johnson appointed former *Secretary of State for International Development* and current *Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy*, Alok Sharma, as COP26 President, also in light of his experience in the field of diplomacy. In meeting with UN *Deputy Secretary-General* Amina Mohammed, he stated: “It is a great honour to take on the role of COP26 President, I have started working with my new team ahead of the summit in Glasgow this November, where we aim to speed up the global journey to *net-zero*. We will be building on efforts to urge all countries to bring forward ambitious plans to curb their emissions ahead of the event itself. It is vital everyone comes together to deliver the change needed [...]”.

On February 27th, COP26 President Alok Sharma spoke at the launch of the COP26 *Private Finance Agenda* at Guildhall building in London: “COP26 will be the biggest summit the UK has ever organised [...] and we are getting ready for it. In my first fortnight as COP President, I have been listening to those who have done this before: meeting people like Paris COP President Laurent Fabius, UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed and Patricia Espinosa from the UNFCCC. We are working closely with our partners in Italy. Our vision for COP26 is clear: in Glasgow, the world must ramp up momentum towards a zero-carbon economy. Agreeing a package that delivers the Paris Agreement and powers the UN

climate process forward. And we will do that, working with all parts of the global economy and society”.²⁵

However, President Sharma also reminded insiders to the process that there are “some areas which need particular attention in 2020”; he acknowledged the criticalities of these areas, saying they must be addressed in order for the efforts to be successful: areas such as adaptation and resilience projects; safeguarding ecosystems; a sustainable energy transition; cleaner road transport and, last but not least, zero-carbon financial investments.

On March 6th, as President Designate, Mr. Sharma delivered a briefing to the UN *Secretary General* and Member States *Permanent Representations* at the U.N. Headquarters, where he stated the following: “In my first 3 weeks as COP26 President I have met with the Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, UNDP Administrator Achim Steiner, UNFCCC Executive Secretary Patricia Espinosa, as well as former COP Presidents, civil society organisations, corporate leaders and finance executives. Encouragingly, there has been a strong level of agreement that we must act now to tackle climate change. Whilst in New York this has been further reinforced through my meetings with the permanent representatives of the Small Island Developing States, Least Developed Countries and others who are on the frontline of climate impacts. Failure to act will cause irreversible consequences [...].

Decarbonisation is the future, with huge opportunities for those who are willing to act now. And, of course, this transition must be fair and inclusive, leaving no-one behind. We all know that the current commitments made under the Paris Agreement fall far short of what is required. [...] So, we want all countries to submit more ambitious *Nationally Determined Contributions*, committing to further cuts in carbon emissions by 2030. With all nations committing to reaching net-zero emissions as soon as possible. Developed countries must honour their commitments, including meeting the 100-billion-dollar goal for climate finance [...]. Ahead of the Summit, with our partner Italy, we will work not just with nations, but also cities, regions, companies, the *Multilateral Development Banks*, the *Development Finance Institutions* and, very importantly, civil society in all its various forms [...] it is often finance that turns good intentions into action: the OECD estimates that we will need nearly 7 trillion

²⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/cop26-president-alok-sharma-at-launch-of-cop26-private-finance-agenda>

dollars a year up to 2030 to meet the Paris Agreement, as well as the *Sustainable Development Goals*. Much of this funding will also need to come from the private sector. [...] As COP26 President, I see my role as the custodian of a process. The UK and Italy will be co-hosting the summit, but success at this event will belong to the whole world. Alongside my Italian counterpart, we will work with you all to develop more ambitious plans on mitigation, adaptation and finance”.²⁶

In her speech at the Briefing by COP26 President, Italian *Permanent Representative* to the UN Mariangela Zappia echoed the words of Mr. Sharma: “In a nutshell, we need to raise the ambition on all fronts: on mitigation, by substantially elevating NDC’s; on adaptation, by supporting the most vulnerable States; and on finance, ensuring that investments strategies are consistent with the goals of the Paris Agreement. [...] Let me now elaborate more specifically on Italy’s contribution in the context of our partnership with the UK. In addition to co-hosting the Pre-COP, we will devote particular attention to the engagement of the youth, building on the positive experience of the *Youth Climate Summit* of last September. The Pre-COP will be preceded by a dedicated youth event, denominated *Youth4Climate2020*.

[...] Furthermore, allow me send a very warm thought to Milan, to the Italian regions that are most affected by the *Coronavirus* emergency and to my beautiful country for the difficult times it is living [...] Coming back to the *Youth4Climate* event, approximately 400 young representatives from around the world, will be invited to elaborate proposals to be provided at the final segment of the youth event. [...] Independently from our role for the COP26, let me also recall Italy’s strong support for the especially vulnerable Small Islands Developing States in the framework of a longstanding partnership”.²⁷

U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres echoed President Sharma in his remarks on March 6th: he emphasized four objectives for COP26: to prompt new NDC’s that reflect higher ambition and are aligned with the current 2025 and 2030 goals; to ensure large emitters’ full commitment to the *net-zero* target for 2050; to strive for more adaptation and mitigation projects and, lastly, to achieve the set goal of 100 billion USD per year through both public

²⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/statement-by-business-secretary-and-cop26-president-alok-sharma-at-the-cop26-briefing-to-all-member-states-at-the-united-nations-new-york>

²⁷ https://italyun.esteri.it/rappresentanza_onu/en/comunicazione/archivio-news/2020/03/briefing-del-presidente-del-cop26.html

and private investment from developed countries. Regarding the latter, Secretary-General Guterres acknowledged the importance of finance in the process, reiterating the key role of the appointed Special Envoy on Climate Action and Finance, Mr. Mark Carney.

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned ramping up of proceedings in view of the COP26 Conference, everything grinded to a halt when, on April 1st, the COP Bureau of the UNFCCC, together with the UK and Italian partners, decided to postpone both the Subsidiary Bodies meetings and the COP26 Conference, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which at the time was starting its spread across Europe and the whole globe. The parties decided to issue a new calendar for the rescheduled Conference in due time, following consultations with the parties involved.

COP26 President-Designate Alok Sharma commented: “The world is currently facing an unprecedented global challenge and countries are rightly focusing their efforts on saving lives and fighting COVID-19. That is why we have decided to reschedule COP26”. Italian Minister for the Environment, Land and Sea Protection, Sergio Costa, added: “Whilst we have decided to postpone COP26 to 2021, including the Pre-COP and *Youth4Climate* event, we remain fully committed to meeting the challenge of climate change. We will continue to work with our British partners to deliver a successful COP26 Conference”.²⁸

²⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/cop26-postponement>

Chapter 2: New perspectives in the traditional multilateral Diplomacy

2.1 Making the case for a coalitional effort

If one were tasked with finding a positive note about the UNFCCC COP26 Conference and all the related side events and subsidiary bodies meetings being postponed to 2021, it would be that the two hosting countries will have more time to engage with their international partners, as well as all the relevant stakeholders, prior to the conference. However, the road to COP26 is far from clear, with the new timeline having faced high uncertainty until very recently. This at a time when the need to coordinate a response to the *Covid-19* outbreak is putting pressure on governments all around the world. Not only that, concerns have mounted over major technical issues that might arise as a result of the pandemic: for example, regarding climate financing or carbon market regulations. Moreover, observers fear that many governments, the U.S, China, Brazil or Australia come to mind, will use this once in a lifetime situation to divert attention from their negligence.²⁹

Clearly, resources will not (and should not) be diverted away from a response to the *Coronavirus* pandemic, but it is equally vital to guarantee that efforts to move the world forward on climate commitments are not put on hold. We will therefore argue that, in order to cope with the structural issue currently facing Climate Diplomacy attempts, already highlighted in the introduction to this research, namely a deadlock in multilateralism and a stalemate in *G-2* relations between the U.S. and China in the context of environmental negotiations, the U.K. and Italy should aim at the creation, nurturing and widening of an ambitious coalitional effort, large and impactful enough as to represent a true second-best alternative to the ideal scenario, namely ambitious multilateral negotiations spearheaded by *G-2* negotiations.

Even in the midst of a global pandemic, the situation of deadlock in multilateralism regarding environmental protection and climate diplomacy does not mean that we ought to relinquish to the dangerous effects of climate change, nor that we must accept the *ipse dixit* limitations in domestic politics either in Washington or Beijing. On the contrary, to try and make do in a

²⁹ <https://www.technologyreview.com/2020/04/10/998969/the-unholy-alliance-of-covid-19-nationalism-and-climate-change/>

time of stalemate in multilateral efforts, means to construct a coalition of willing actors: one through which the international community might still, *in absentia* of an idyllic solution (namely a defining, all-encompassing multilateral treaty), make worthy, albeit somewhat expedient, progress aimed at the substantial mitigation of climate change.

The latter would encompass all those countries, sub-national units such as regions, provinces, cities, as well as governmental agencies and private actors, from the corporate to the individual spectrum, that are willing to strive for the kind of GHG limitations needed to make serious advancements. Indeed, it has been argued that coalitions, as *ad-hoc* constructed networks, arising within multilateral settings, composed of actors with differing interests and priorities, yet having some degree of commonality in their aspirations, can reduce the sophistications of multilateral negotiations, as well as enhancing the weight of participants by bringing together previously dispersed forces, thus representing a valuable alternative in some instances.³⁰

Taken together, all of the above-mentioned actors make up what scholars and analysts call the “regime complex” for the environment, meaning the collection of attempts at climate governance by public and private, large and minute entities³¹ (although the original connotation did not account for private entities). Notable political scientists R. Keohane and D. Victor have argued that: “a climate change regime complex, if it meets specified criteria, has advantages over any politically feasible comprehensive regime, particularly with respect to adaptability and flexibility. These characteristics are particularly important in an environment of high uncertainty, such as in the case of climate change where the most demanding international commitments are interdependent, yet governments vary widely in their interest and ability to implement such commitments”. Moreover, it has been argued that such an institutionally fragmented global climate governance structure, which is best captured

³⁰ Dupont, C. (1996) *“International Negotiation: Foundations, Models and Philosophies”*. 47-64, Republic of Letters Publishing. 1996.

³¹ Keohane, R. and Victor, D. (2010) *“The Regime Complex for Climate Change”*. Discussion Paper 10-33, The Harvard Project on International Climate Agreements, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, January 2010.

by the above-mentioned notion of regime complex, initially came to be in the aftermath of the Copenhagen summit in 2009.³²

In essence, with the “traditional” multilateral approach stalled, policymakers and stakeholders alike ought to look at this wider array of climate governance instruments, in order to amass enough momentum to take this non-multilateral perspectives to such a scale where they can effectively make a difference with regards to the issue at hand, but perhaps, as others have argued, also help to lay the foundations to restore some groundwork for a functioning multilateralism³³.

As already mentioned, since the dawn of the new millennium, the distributional equilibrium of economic power has started to shift towards “emerging economies” and away from the Western powers³⁴. In the context of environmental negotiations, the latter has created a perception that geopolitical power is inevitably tilting toward developing countries, such as the *BASIC* group countries³⁵. Moreover, scholars have argued that such changes in geopolitical power also altered relative influence in the realm of climate diplomacy³⁶.

2.2 Case study: the “Leadiating” role of the European Union

To exemplify such notion, let us take the case of the European Union, to this day still the largest economy in the world: whereas the U.S. and China are effective veto players, the situation concerning the E.U. is different, even though the two largest emitters also aspire to *GHG* reductions, they are unambiguously less concerned that the E.U: the Union has been undisputedly leading the charge in climate diplomacy, already since the 1997 Kyoto Protocol; however, it has consistently done so through multilateralism rather than bilaterally or via smaller forums, be it coalitional or “minilateral” (see Victor, 2011).

³² Victor, D. (2011) *“Global Warming Gridlock. Creating More Effective Strategies for Protecting the Planet”*, Cambridge University Press.

³³ Hale, T. (2011) *“A Climate Coalition of the Willing”*. The Washington Quarterly, Routledge, February 2011.

³⁴ Roberts, J.T. (2011) *“Multipolarity and the new world (dis)order: US hegemonic decline and the fragmentation of the global climate regime”*, *Global Environmental Change* 21: 776-84.

³⁵ Hurrell, A. and Sengupta, S. (2012) *“Emerging powers, North-South relations and global climate politics”*, *International Affairs* 88(3): 463-84.

³⁶ Bäckstrand, K. and Elgström, O. (2013) *“The EU’s role in climate change negotiations: from leader to ‘leadiator’”*. *Journal of European Public Policy*, May 22, 2013.

By contrast, the E.U. was not as successful in amassing support for a Kyoto Protocol successor agreement: put succinctly, it did not realize the changes in relative power of major emitters, especially in the developing world (see Bäckstrand and Elgström, 2013). A recurrent argument among scholars is that the 2009 COP15 Conference in Copenhagen symbolizes the failure of European multilateral climate leadership (see Victor, 2011): in short, the Union's bid for a single global agreement, binding on all parties, was isolated by the U.S. and the BASIC group, who then went on to hammer out a deal which lacked binding emission limiting targets or timetables³⁷.

The European attempt at crafting a legally-binding universal agreement was hailed by many observers as too norm-driven and politically ingenuous, unsuited for the realist dynamics of the context, one dictated by short-sightedness and self-interest among the parties involved: “the Union tried to upload its preferred policy solutions to the international level”³⁸. Furthermore, the insistence on a single-track protocol for developed and developing realities alike by the E.U. also created resentment among even the more environmentally “benevolent” developing countries (such as South Africa and Mexico). The Union was deemed hypocritical and uncompromising, unable to exert the necessary influence on developing countries; the latter, coupled with the impossibility of attaining compromise with the U.S. or the BASIC countries, bereft the European Union of the necessary leverage in the runup to the so-called *Copenhagen Accord*³⁹.

Some have argued that its dismal performance in Copenhagen provided a wake-up call for the European Union: it now had to come face to face with the changing power distribution in environmental negotiations, which resulted in an important strategic shift, from a normative and ideational stance to a more realist and structural one, taking notice of changes in power relations and thus prioritizing coalition-building and gap-bridging⁴⁰. Scholars have captured

³⁷ Bodansky, D. (2010) “*The Copenhagen Climate Conference: a post-mortem*”, *American Journal of International Law* 104(2): 230-40.

³⁸ Van Schaik, L. and Schunz, S. (2012) “*Explaining EU activism and impact in global climate politics: is the EU a norm- or interest-driven actor?*”. *Journal of Common Market Studies* 50(1): 169-86.

³⁹ Kilian, B. and Elgstrom, O. (2010) “*Still a green leader? The European Union's role in international climate negotiations*”, *Cooperation and Conflict* 45(3): 255-73.

⁴⁰ Harvey, F. (2011) “*Durban talks. How Connie Hedegaard got countries to agree to on climate deal*”, *Guardian*, December 11, 2011.

such change in role through the notion of the E.U. as *leadiator*, that is a leader and a mediator, working along, rather than against, the mentioned changing geopolitical landscape.

Indeed, the European Union entered negotiations at COP17 in Durban by making its endorsement of a renewed Kyoto Protocol (*KP-II*) conditional on the stipulation of a clear roadmap towards legally binding commitments by major polluters, while simultaneously making progress in forming an alliance with the AOSIS group and the African group: such coalition was unequivocally facilitated by a rift among the BASIC group countries and the Small Islands, but was equally aided by the European efforts, prior to the conference, to enter into informal coalitions outside the realm of the U.N. structure⁴¹.

So, while a worldwide, multilateral treaty of the kind sought by the European Union at Copenhagen or Cancun would surely be the best option to tackle climate change, the best option, as argued above, is not currently available. Rather than giving up at the absence of intergovernmental action, proactive civil-society components and corporations have spurred transnational governance efforts of their own: voluntary environmental or sustainability standards, compliance mechanisms, premiums and rewards for the more virtuous such as labels to ingratiate green-minded customers or investors. Such instruments are at the helm of new forms of transnational regulations, which are to join and complement, rather than supersede, classic intergovernmental organizations.

2.3 The dynamics of a coalitional effort: sub-national units and private entities

The argument put forth in this chapter then, is to envision a process of coalition building spearheaded by the United Kingdom and Italy in the guise of *Leadiators*: advancing the environmental agenda of the coalition, seeking to inspire new adhesions to the latter, coordinating the efforts of its many stakeholders, State and non-State actors; whilst at the same time acting as bridge-builders between the interests of “recalcitrant” actors. As others have correctly pointed out, if the case of the E.U. in the timespan between the COP15 and COP17 Conferences is of any instruction, such attitude in conducting negotiations has the potential to gain some considerable ground, bypassing the current stalemate in multilateral

⁴¹ Christoff, P. (2010) “*Cold climate in Copenhagen: China and the United States at COP15*”, Environmental Politics 19(4): 637-56.

climate negotiations and, perhaps, it could also contribute to disentangle it (see Bäckstrand and Elgström, 2013).

There are many an example of “transnational climate governance”: at the local level for instance, the *C-40 Network* comes to mind, which in their words: “connects 96 of the world’s greatest cities to take bold climate action, leading the way towards a healthier and more sustainable future. Representing 700+ million citizens and one quarter of the global economy, mayors of the C40 cities are committed to delivering on the most ambitious goals of the Paris Agreement at the local level”⁴². Moreover, finance-wise, the *Ceres Investor Network on Climate*: “includes over 175 institutional investors, managing more than \$29 trillion in assets, advancing leading investment practices, corporate engagement strategies, and key policy and regulatory solutions. Some of our key investor coalitions and initiatives include the *Global Investor Coalition on Climate Change*, *Climate Action 100+* and *The Investor Agenda*”⁴³. However, these initiatives remain too specific and narrow in scope to be incisive on the larger than life issue of climate change; more needs to be done and the road for policymakers is clear: to put together a bulky enough coalition to scale up initiatives as the problem requires.

More to the point, what shape would a climate coalition of the willing take? If one looks through the lenses of nation-states, the balance between climate “leaders” and “laggards”, so to speak, would seem unequivocally leaning toward the latter; however, at a closer look, one would see that, even in reluctant countries such as the U.S. or China, many sub-national governments, provinces, cities and towns often retain discretion over climate related policies such as transport, energy supply or production chains.

At this lower, sub-national level of analysis, the U.S. is found to actually perform much better than Washington *per se*⁴⁴: a bright example is represented by the *We Are Still In* initiative, a remarkable, one of a kind effort to mitigate the United States’ government inaction on the subject of climate action, in their words: “Since its initial release on June 5, 2017, more than 3,800 leaders from America’s city halls, state houses, boardrooms and college campuses, representing more than 155 million Americans and \$9 trillion of the U.S. economy have

⁴² <https://www.c40.org/>

⁴³ <https://www.ceres.org/networks/ceres-investor-network>

⁴⁴ Hultman, N. 2019. “*Building an ambitious US climate policy from the bottom up, A review of the new report, 'Accelerating America's Pledge'*”. Brookings, Dec. 9, 2019.

signed the *W.A.S.I.* declaration. Hundreds more have signed similar declarations in support of climate action. In the absence of leadership from Washington, states, cities, counties, tribes, colleges and universities, healthcare organizations, businesses and investors, representing a sizeable percentage of the U.S. economy will pursue ambitious climate goals, working together to take forceful action and to ensure that the U.S. remains a global leader in reducing emissions”.⁴⁵

Furthermore, many West Coast, Midwestern and North-Eastern states have developed regional climate action plans that prompt individual states to take serious GHG limitation measures, coupled with more than a thousand mayors who have signed the *U.S. Conference of Mayors’ Climate Protection Agreement*, pledging their constituencies to uphold the Kyoto Protocol and Paris Agreement voluntarily. At the federal level as well, regardless of the Senate repeatedly blocking climate legislation, the *Environmental Protection Agency* (EPA) has considerable authority to reign in GHG emissions without the Congress’ approval. Concerning civil-society groups and individual action, many organizations that one would not immediately connect to climate action are also taking a stand: for example, the *Catholic Climate Covenant* asks individuals to commit to the so-called “St. Francis pledge”.⁴⁶

Moreover, there is a similar degree of support by state and non-state actors in China as well: the *National Ministry of Environmental Protection* lacks the authority of its just mentioned American counterpart, but it has a fair degree of leeway to develop climate initiatives and programs, as long as it, or other sub-national entities do not obstruct the interests of powerful actors. Indeed, the municipalities of Beijing and Tianjin have both created functioning carbon-trading and technology transfer schemes,⁴⁷ and in general concerning themselves with issues such as energy transition and GHG reduction, sooner and better than the CCP hierarchy itself.

However, in order to make a big enough impact, transnational and sub-national climate governance initiatives must increase in magnitude and scope: how to foster such an outcome? As mentioned, several sub-national entities which together accounting for large shares of the world population and GDP are taking initiative, but how can these coordinate and channel the

⁴⁵ <https://www.wearestillin.com/we-are-still-declaration>

⁴⁶ <https://catholicclimatecovenant.org/about/story>

⁴⁷ [https://icapcarbonaction.com/en/?option=com_etsmap&task=export&format=pdf&layout=list&systems\[\]=53](https://icapcarbonaction.com/en/?option=com_etsmap&task=export&format=pdf&layout=list&systems[]=53)

efforts and resources outside the realm of sovereign entities in a multilateral setting? Only a few heads of state wield the necessary stature and power to convene such a coalitional effort as to make a significant impact on the issue.

Also, existing transnational climate governance initiatives are mostly located in wealthy, industrialized countries, due to the stronger, more expert civil society initiatives; however, the projections for total GHG emissions are unequivocally tilting toward developing countries, as indeed we are already witnessing (as of 2019, China is the world's largest CO₂ emitter – accounting for more than one-quarter of emissions; followed by the USA at 15%; EU-28's 10%; India's 7%; and Russia's 5%).⁴⁸

Therefore, the challenge of supporting and involving climate actors in developing countries must be addressed successfully in order for a concrete coalitional effort to bring about progress. There can be many ways to engage actors in the developing world: perhaps one could be to “nest” the transnational, *bottom-up* approach within the UNFCCC process itself, precisely because such coalition would involve many non-sovereign units, it would nonetheless benefit from the endorsement and indeed the visibility provided by the highest climate institution, while also trying to restore some momentum in multilateral negotiations (see Hale, 2011). To that purpose, many instruments can be used for different actors, some with legal validity, some with “soft” enforcement measures.

For example: “mini-lateral” treaties with ambitious countries, in order to strike a deal regardless of climate “laggards”; unilateral regulations, such those adopted by the E.U. countries or U.S. states such as California and many others, together accounting for a growing portion of the reductions needed, without the need for legal obligations; voluntary efforts by private entities, as mentioned above, pro-climate measures by large and small firms have proliferated in the last decade or so, with much room to increase efforts, representing an important area for progress, especially if governments endorse them; lastly, individual commitments and civil society initiatives ought to be considered carefully, as they can potentially provide a host of tools at the coalition's disposal: mechanisms such as online registries to publicize positive initiatives and to bring attention on firms and governments violating their commitments or renegeing on them (similar to those in the U.N. Global

⁴⁸ <https://www.iea.org/articles/global-co2-emissions-in-2019>

Compact);⁴⁹ technological transfers and capacity-building networks, to make the coalition appeal to realities in need of innovation (see Hale, 2011).

More importantly, the best tool at the coalitions' disposal would be to pressure climate *laggards* and *free riders*, both indirectly, through the incentives represented by learning networks and technological transfers; but also directly, through more decisive measures, such as targeted sanctions, as the so-called “carbon tariffs” are allowed by the *World Trade Organization* (WTO), if applied in a non-discriminatory manner.⁵⁰

2.4 The planning of a coalitional effort: theory and practice

Moreover, within the literature on coalition building, one distinction is that between coalitions united by common goals and values; and coalitions which pursue issue-specific objectives (see Dupont, 1996). Moreover, a perhaps wider and more exhaustive classification is that distinguishing between five coalitional categories, these are: close-knit coalitions made up of participants which are united on a broad number of issues; intra-bloc groups (for example, the Scandinavian countries in *GATT* negotiations); issue-specific groupings, meaning those coalitions that are together on a single issue; opportunistic or tactical alignments; lastly, external actors, united by their exogeneity to the *locus* of negotiations (a clear example is the *GATT Secretariat*).⁵¹ Other distinctions have been put forth, such as the degree of visibility or soft-power of the coalition; the degree of cohesion (which in my view is more related to the classification based on goals made by Ira Zartman); behaviour of the members; and finally, strategies adopted by the coalition (see Dupont, 1996).

So, having explored some of the most influential literature on coalitions and coalition-building, a much harder task is to connect the theory with the practice: in reality, theoretical models are not guaranteed to find concrete application in diplomatic settings, this is because parties to a negotiation may be unclear on the preferences, avails and qualities of others. Also, processual factors such as behaviours, shifts in relative power, or unforeseen

⁴⁹ <https://www.unglobalcompact.org/sdgs/In-action-plan>

⁵⁰ Veel, P. E., 2009. “*Carbon Tariffs and the WTO: An Evaluation of Feasible Policies*”. *Journal of International Economic Law* 12, no. 3 - 2009, pp. 749—800.

⁵¹ Zartman, I.W. (1994) “*International Multilateral Negotiation*”. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc.

circumstances might repeatedly modify conditions in a negotiation setting, thus the planning process in the building of a coalition is of the utmost importance.

The latter consists of several items: firstly, costs\benefits calculations, a major difficulty here is that costs and benefits might have low tangibility or divisibility and, while preference analysis may help, the distance between abstract and concrete calculations ought not to be forgotten); secondly, the size of a coalition is a determinant factor for effectiveness: there are cases in which large size is a necessity, such as in those settings in which decisions are based on voting, however, in other instances, small size might be a key to success, it has been argued that the optimal size of a coalition depends on the metis of each individual case;⁵² third, leadership is a key element of the coalition planning process: strong leadership is usually a prerequisite for effectiveness, although too strong of a leadership might backfire, prompting conflictual attitudes within the coalition; fourth, cohesion is an important factor, insofar as the quest for common positions might create frictions: in very complex or long-drawn negotiations, tensions can arise as a result of cross-cutting issues; last but not least, proximity: it might relate to material interests, or to ideological or value-driven compatibility, it is determinant in assessing the interest of the various actors (see Dupont, 1996).

These factors also reveal the need for scholars to devote close attention to coalition-planning, within the context of coalition-formation: each of the factors mentioned above can be of help to policy-makers and negotiators, insofar as they help selecting the best suited coalition settings and to adapt to different circumstances. These factors are endogenous to coalitions, that is they arise within the coalition itself.

Some exogenous factors exist as well, meaning they relate to conditions external to coalitions: these are the roles that actors take on in multilateral settings, but are also relevant to coalitions: these are the power balance, the weight of stakes for individual items and the decision-making procedures for a given negotiation; in other words, these are the roles that negotiators assume, which according to a number of influential scholars are five.⁵³

⁵² Kravitz, D.A. (1987) “*Size of Smallest Coalition as a Source of Power in Coalition Bargaining*”. *European Journal of Social Psychology* 17: 1-21.

⁵³ Sjostedt, G., Spector, B. and Zartman, I.W. (1994) “*The Dynamics of Regime-Building Negotiations*”. London: Graham and Trotman.

The first of these roles is that of *Drivers*, that is leaders who “try to organize the participation to produce an agreement that is consonant with their interest” (see Sjostedt *et al.*, 1994: 11). Drivers take it upon themselves to coordinate efforts and maintain stability within the coalition, as well as to look for possible new supporters (such notion is similar to that of “entrepreneurs”, advanced by other scholars).⁵⁴

Another role is that of *Conductors*, which also seek to produce concrete results, but from a distanced, neutral position; Conductors are more similar to *Defenders*, meaning actors concerned with a single or limited number of issues within the negotiation. The difference is seen as a matter of degree of involvement: Conductors are usually consensus-driven neutrals, while Defenders have their own interests and might cooperate with this or that coalition in accordance with their interests (see Sjostedt *et al.*, 1994).

Furthermore, *Brakers* are those actors that seek to block an agreement and retain their freedom of action, often regarding a limited number of issues; sometimes, Brakers might also adopt a conscious strategy to “sell” their participation on a certain issue. Finally, *Cruisers* are those actors “with no strong interests of their own and so available to act as followers” (see Sjostedt *et al.*, 1994: 11). They are somehow close in scope to Conductors, insofar as they have no priority interest and adopt a neutral stance.

The latter typology necessitates of two more items, namely role determination and role stability: the former relates to the degree of motivation (the determinants of which are, quite intuitively, the stakes of the negotiations and the values of the negotiator); the latter revolves around the medium to long term changes in operational patterns in a given coalition: first, there is a physiological “erosion” process that arises from perceptions and daily interactions among negotiators, secondly, within a coalition, one or more factions might emerge as a result of compromise or lack thereof (see Dupont, 1996).

Therefore, influences and patterns within a coalition are not static and are expected to be reshaped by several factors, such as: organizational apparatus, degree of notoriety or delicacy of the issue, the hierarchies within the coalition, resources at the coalition’s disposal, and more.⁵⁵ So, all of the characteristics mentioned above contribute, either positively or

⁵⁴ Lax, D.A. and Sebenius, J.K. (1986) *The Manager as Negotiator*. New York: Free Press.

⁵⁵ Stevenson, W.B., Pearce, J.L. and Porter, L.W. (1985) *The Concept of Coalition in Organization Theory and Research*. *Academy of Management Review* 10: 256-268.

negatively, to the degree of effectiveness of a coalition and the clarity of its objectives; to assess the performance of a coalitional endeavour, all the factors here described, such as bargaining power, role patterns, leadership, cohesion, organizational structure, strategies and procedures, are to be taken into account (see Dupont, 1996).

In essence, given the barriers represented by *G-2* domestic politics, policymakers, as well as civil society at large, ought to recognize the possibilities and instruments that lie beneath the UNFCCC process: throughout the globe, even in *G-2* local governments, regions, cities and private entities at any level, are taking bold action despite the multilateral stalemate. The argument here is that political leaders across the spectrum should concern themselves with supporting, expanding and directing resources and visibility to such a coalitional apparatus; applying the necessary pressure to bring such non-multilateral approach at the forefront of environmental governance initiatives.

Even so, there are no guarantees that it will attain the necessary results, as already stated, a climate coalition of the willing is logically a second-best solution to ambitious multilateral commitments, for it allows reluctant countries to take advantage of file leaders' sacrifices. However, if looked at from a different perspective, it has been argued that such effort could very well revamp multilateralism itself: through the advancement of sustainable technologies and mitigation programs, the constraints of economic and political viability stemming by cost-benefit considerations of many laggards today might diminish or mutate, thus proving the practicability of a development model that ensures the cohabitation of our shared natural environment with the necessary advancement of economic possibilities.

Chapter 3: Coalition-building in the context of the COP26 Diplomatic process

3.1 Coalition-building at the governmental level

This chapter will firstly focus on the diplomatic process related to shaping and solidifying the structure of the envisioned climate coalition of the willing. We will then return to the workings in view of the COP26 Conference: focusing on the main diplomatic and indeed technical difficulties the UK and Italy will have to face in navigating the disruptions imposed on all of us by the Covid-19 pandemic, therefore illustrating the process related to seeking out a pathway to ensure a significant and successful COP26, as well as all the related events, notwithstanding the current situation of uncertainty and unprecedented challenges.

Regarding the construction of said coalitional effort, the U.K. and Italy devoted particular attention to bilateral relations with countries that, in the above-mentioned “mini-lateral” context, could very well tilt the balance in a deal not involving the G-2 official governments: Australia, Brazil, India, Malaysia, Mexico and the Pacific Islands, concerning the United Kingdom; African and Latin American countries with respect to Italy. In fact, throughout 2019 and 2020, as the proceedings for the organization of COP26 got under way, the two hosting countries did not lose time in strengthening ties with the aforementioned countries. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson held several telephone calls with some of his most significant counterparts, coalition-wise: on December 18th, 2019, he spoke with Indian PM Narendra Modi, the two heads of state pledged to keep working closely to step up cooperation on climate change ahead of the COP26 Conference.⁵⁶

Moreover, the following day, December 19th, saw British High Commissioner to Malaysia Charles Hay weigh in on the U.K.\Malaysia relationship: “The longstanding UK and Malaysia relationship is a strong foundation for us to build on. Bilateral trade between the UK and Malaysia has increased 10% to £5 billion and we look forward to growing this even further. The UK will continue to support Malaysia in its reform agenda through the sharing of British expertise and experience. [...] With both the UK and Malaysia sharing a common goal in tackling climate change and plastic waste, we have a unique opportunity to work together to address these global problems, ahead of the U.N. COP26 Conference which the UK will co-host with Italy in 2020”.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-call-with-prime-minister-modi-18-december-2019>

⁵⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-hopes-to-further-strengthen-existing-ties-with-malaysia>

Furthermore, PM Johnson also called Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, on January 15th 2020: they discussed the issue of climate change and committed to keep working together in view of COP26;⁵⁸ this last point should not be taken lightly, insofar as President Bolsonaro has been repeatedly accused of having turned Brazil into a threat for environmental protection.⁵⁹

Also, on March 20th, 2020, the U.K. was confirmed as co-chair of the Governing Council on the India-led *Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure* (CDRI). The U.K. was represented by Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, as well as COP26 President, Alok Sharma, who participated remotely on account of the Covid-19 pandemic and stated: "I was pleased to be able to join the inaugural meeting and confirm the UK as the first co-chair of the *CDRI*. Delivering action on climate change remains a priority for the UK and I am sure that the UK-India partnership on climate action will help see progress on reducing emissions and help make India's infrastructure fit for the future".⁶⁰

Concerning Italy too, efforts to nurture the mentioned coalitional effort started early in the COP26 runup: on December 13th, 2019, Vice Minister Del Re attended bilateral consultations with South African Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Alvin Botes, in Pretoria. They agreed to cooperate in the context of COP26, especially with regards to the *Youth4Climate* event that Italy will host in preparation for the Conference.⁶¹

Moreover, on January 22nd, 2020, the Italian Embassy in Kenya together with the *Politecnico* of Milan, *ENEL Green Power* and the *Res4Africa Foundation*, organized an event on the subject of renewable energy to establish synergies between the two countries: speaking at the meeting's opening, Italian Ambassador to Kenya, Alberto Pieri, said: "renewable energies are a milestone in the strategy against climate change and at the same time represent a key component in the promotion of sustainable development. In this major sector, Italy and Kenya can establish a winning partnership". Also, The representative of the Kenyan Government, the *Energy Minister* of Kenya, Charles Keter said: "I recognise the fundamental

⁵⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-ministers-call-with-president-bolsonaro-of-brazil-15-january-2020>

⁵⁹ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/01/04/brazil-was-a-global-leader-on-climate-change-now-its-a-threat/>

⁶⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-becomes-co-chair-of-india-led-global-climate-initiative>

⁶¹ https://www.esteri.it/mae/en/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/retediplomatica/2019/12/del-re-a-consultazioni-politiche-bilaterali-italia-sudafrica.html

role of our partners as a key factor in attracting more and more investment, and I encourage the development of collaborations aimed at exchanging expertise and good practices in education, research and innovation to promote sustainable development in Kenya".⁶²

Furthermore, Minister of Foreign Affairs Luigi Di Maio, intervened, on July 7th, 2020, in a videoconference on the relaunch of the Dialogue between Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean: Di Maio assured that, as co-president of COP26 and of the upcoming G20, Italy wants to keep working with Latin American and Caribbean countries on topics such as energy, adaptation and resilience projects and climate finance.⁶³

3.2 How to cope with the challenges Diplomacy is presented with by Covid-19

The collection of challenges mentioned in the first paragraph of this chapter, be them related to negotiating issues or technical ones, requires innovative thinking and radical solutions, insofar as dealing with a global pandemic, whilst struggling to keep on track with one's environmental objectives, calls for a rethinking of the way climate diplomacy is conducted, at least for the time being. Fortunately there is no shortage of new ideas regarding these considerations, many experts on the subject have called for the full digitalization of the diplomatic process pertaining to environmental negotiations: for example, a team of scholars from the *Euro-Mediterranean Center on Climate Change (CMCC)*, the *Ca' Foscari University of Venice* and the *University College of London (UCL)*, have proposed mechanisms to make the UNFCCC process more transparent and accessible, while at the same time retaining effectiveness amidst the *Covid-19* emergency. Interestingly, they proposed a *Digital COP26* as a way to assist, rather than substitute, the workings of the Conference, especially during these troubled times.⁶⁴

However, it must be said that, even if the idea technically falls within the realm of feasibility, a whole host of problems might arise, in the words of Elisa Calliari, researcher at CMCC Foundation and the Ca' Foscari University: "besides issues of real-time translation into the six UN languages, the digital divide between developed and developing countries could result

⁶² https://www.esteri.it/mae/en/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/retediplomatica/2020/01/kenya-l-esperienza-italiana-nelle-energie-rinnovabili.html

⁶³ https://www.esteri.it/mae/en/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/comunicati/2020/07/il-ministro-di-maio-alla-videoconferenza-sul-rilancio-del-dialogo-tra-europa-e-america-latina-e-caraibi.html

⁶⁴ Calliari E., J. Mysiak, L. Vanhala, "A digital climate summit to maintain Paris Agreement ambition". *Nature Journal -Climate Change*, June 1st, 2020.

in an additional source of power asymmetry within the UNFCCC process. Moreover, a digital negotiation would ask to renounce to face-to-face diplomacy, which plays an important role in building trust and fostering international cooperation. Yet, after having participated to COPs for many years now, we wonder whether these mega-events are the most efficient and effective way to foster cooperation on climate action”.

Having said that, the above-mentioned researchers have also suggested that retaining the benefits of in-person negotiation does not automatically imply to postpone the many side events and formalities that make the COPs’ very crowded. More to the point, Jaroslav Mysiak, director of the risk assessment and adaptation strategies’ division of the CMCC, explains that: “We imagine a new format, which can maintain political momentum for climate action while ensuring participation from business, research and civil society. A Digital COP26 can serve this purpose, as a virtual space where all the aspects that do not need to be formally negotiated by countries can be announced and discussed. [...] Parties' unilateral pledges on more ambitious national climate plans and strategies to reach net-zero emissions by 2050 can be announced in this virtual space, together with their climate finance commitments and initiatives to strengthen communities' resilience. Moreover, our proposal includes the translation into video conferences of the rich programme of side-events, which characterizes every year’s COP” (see Calliari *et al.*, 2020).

3.3 The restructuring of preparations for COP26

With regards to the institutional proceedings and preparations for COP26, on the Italian side, Environment Minister Sergio Costa, on April 16th, speaking at a virtual *Diplomatic Discourse* session organized by the *Circolo di Studi Diplomatici* based in Rome, vigorously reiterated his commitment to the issue, despite the severity of the Covid-19 situation at the time, in Italy and indeed the whole world: “I wish to reaffirm the strong commitment that our Government has taken on when signing the partnership with the U.K. to organize COP26 together, due to take place this year but inevitably postponed to 2021. [...] That is why, in conjunction with our role of facilitators and actors of moral suasion, particularly towards the more “problematic” countries, we envision, within the Pre-COP events, an increase in ambition by non-State actors, as well as by local governments, the industrial sector, renewable energy sector and sustainable food production chains: all realms in which Italy can boast excellence renowned the world over. [...] In synergy with the United Kingdom, [...] we will overcome

the tragedy of *Coronavirus* without going backwards or standing still, but moving forward, leaving no one behind”.⁶⁵

Arguably the first occasion to collectively address the situation with regard to the pandemic and the postponement of the COP26 Conference came on April 27th, at the 11th *Petersburg Climate Dialogue*, an important annual Ministerial Meeting established a decade ago under the patronage of Germany, which brings together Ministers from countries within the UNFCCC. Due to obvious reasons, this year’s meeting had to be convened through virtual means, including the so-called *High-Level Segment*, during which many relevant stakeholders, some of whom had already reiterated their commitments to climate action on the timely occasion of *Earth Day* on April 22nd, have alerted the international community to the concrete risk of neglecting such commitments due to the strains put on economic systems by the pandemic.

Kristalina Georgieva, Managing Director of the *International Monetary Fund*, exhorted: “In the minds of some, the health crisis and the ‘great lockdown’ needed to address it, mean that we can push the pause button in the fight against the other existential crisis we face, namely our changing climate. Nothing is further from the truth. We are about to deploy a massive fiscal stimulus which can help us address both crises at the same time.”

Furthermore, COP26 President Alok Sharma added: “While we rightly focus on fighting the immediate crisis of the Coronavirus, we must not lose sight of the huge challenges of climate change. The challenge we face is: how do we speed up progress towards a zero emission and climate-resilient global economy, whilst at the same time creating jobs and supporting communities through the transition? And, of course, that it is particularly important now as a result of where the global economy finds itself in the Covid-19 situation. As you know we have defined a number of key themes for COP26, which include transition to clean energy, clean transport, nature-based solutions, adaptation as well as resilience projects and, of course, finance to bring it all together. Italian Environment Minister Sergio Costa made the very important point about the relevance of the youth, and the work we will be doing with our friends and colleagues in Italy in terms of pre-COP and particularly the youth events that they are going to be leading ahead of COP26”.

⁶⁵ https://www.esteri.it/mae/resource/doc/2020/05/dialogo_diplomatico_n._247.pdf

Regarding finance, Mark Carney, United Nations Special Envoy for Climate Action and Finance, UK Prime Minister's Finance Adviser for COP26 and outgoing *Bank of England* Governor, addressed the reality that the economic outlook of the post-Covid19 world will be structurally altered, not just due to reallocation of capital and investments, together with the intricate debt restructuring which will pair with it: "we are experiencing decades of change within weeks" Mr. Carney stated. However, he also went on to say that such restructuring might present us with opportunities to strive for sustainability, especially in the financial realm. He also admonished the latter to account for the climate risk of investments, to commit to a standardized model of full, mandatory disclosure and, ultimately, to improve risk management.

In essence, throughout the duration of the *Petersburg Climate Dialogue*, three all-encompassing requisites to finance the necessary climate ambition in the current pandemic emergency became evident : firstly, the emphasis on boots-on solutions for a green financial recovery, as highlighted by Mr. Carney's framework of risk management. Secondly, the need to improve bridging between the many consultations and initiatives, as to improve cooperation and better seize opportunities across the whole economic and energetic spectrum. Lastly, to prompt better cooperation between private and public actors and institutions: avoiding the pitfall of the so-called *silo mentality*, to ensure that the whole range of instruments needed (in particular regarding developing countries) to maximize the ever-decanted climate action, are effectively put in place. This last point was further underlined in her speech by Tosca Barucco, *Special Envoy for COP26* of the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs.⁶⁶

Moreover, On May 6th, Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio and Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Dominic Raab, by way of a telephone conversation, addressed the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic, the agenda for the two countries' presidencies of G7 and G20 summits respectively, the COP26 partnership and, last but not

⁶⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/petersberg-climate-dialogue-summary-video>

least, shared their views and relevant information regarding the challenges and possibilities related to sustainable economic recovery.⁶⁷

3.4 The Diplomatic process re-shaping the COP26 structure

A pivotal moment in the process of navigating such time of uncertainty was undoubtedly the consultations among the COP26 insider and organizing parties, namely the U.K., Italy and the UNFCCC Bureau itself, as well as a host of actors further down the line of the so-called organizational framework. Such consultations were carried out during the whole month of May 2020, leading to a proposed rescheduling document jointly issued by COP26 *Cabinet Envoy* John Murton and COP26 *Cabinet Lead Negotiator* Archie Young, highlighting the necessity of the postponement and the gravity of the situation, as well as the thoroughness of consultations ahead of the May 28th Bureau meeting, with all the relevant actors: the Italian Government, Bureau members, the Secretariat, SB Chairs, Group Chairs, the Chilean COP25 Presidency, Non-Party stakeholders and all the necessary delivery partners. Importantly, consultations were carried out in close collaboration with the African Group, also due to implications that might arise in view of COP27, which the AGN maintains should be held in Africa, as originally foreseen.

The consultations also brought forth the priorities of health, inclusiveness and representation of all Parties and Non-Party actors, allowing the necessary time to prepare work to deliver effectively on negotiations mandates for all actors. They then went on to assure that every party effectively agreed with said priorities and that consideration has been given for the international calendar of events not to be affected by the rescheduling of COP26. With all the above-mentioned premises in place, the U.K. authorities have proposed to reschedule COP26 on 1-12 November 2021; having concluded that such dates would constitute the lowest risk of further issues, given the uneven spread of Covid-19 witnessed so far.⁶⁸

Therefore, also given the unusual time gap between COP25 in Madrid and the next Conference of the Parties, it is important to underline, as indeed the mentioned consultations did, that Climate Action for the year 2020 must account for the disruptions and difficulties

⁶⁷ https://www.esteri.it/mae/en/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/approfondimenti/colloquio-telefonico-tra-il-ministro-di-maio-e-il-segretario-di-stato-per-gli-affari-esteri-e-del-commonwealth-dominic-raab.html

⁶⁸ <https://www.ukcop26.org/new-dates-agreed-for-cop26-united-nations-climate-change-conference/>

that arose: Parties are expected to increase national ambition and do so by submitting increased NDC's, as well as forward-looking strategies with respect to *net-zero*, the all-important \$100 billion climate finance goal, the restructuring of transport and local adaptation projects. Finally, the report on consultations for the rescheduling of COP26 also included a proposed timeline to put forward at the incoming Bureau meeting.

So, on May 28th, the Bureau of the COP to the UNFCCC, in conjunction with the U.K. and Italy, convened in London to settle the question of new dates for COP26, now set to take place between November 1st and 12th, 2021, with the original venue of Glasgow being maintained. Such dates are also meant to facilitate the retaining of momentum for climate action, or conversely to keep such momentum from evaporating, also through the timely occurrences of the U.K.'s G7 and Italy's G20 presidencies.

Moreover, the co-hosts also announced that the list of senior figures advising or patronizing the Conference has significantly widened, with the creation of a new advisory board, called *Friends of COP*: a collection of 25 adept advisers to the Presidency, with expertise ranging through various sectors and spanning six continents. Together with their advisory role, they will also foster action from their own sectors and inspire new ideas in the run-up to the Conference: said board includes personalities such as Christiana Figueres, former Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC; Eric Garcetti, Mayor of Los Angeles; Sharan Burrow, General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation; Nick Mabey, Chief Executive of E3G; just to name a few.

Speaking after the ratification of the new dates, COP26 President Alok Sharma said: "With the new dates for COP26 now agreed we are working with our international partners on an ambitious roadmap for global climate action between now and November 2021. The steps we take to rebuild our economies will have a profound impact on our societies' future sustainability, resilience and wellbeing. COP26 can be a moment where the world unites behind a clean resilient recovery [...]". From the Italian perspective, Minister Sergio Costa acknowledged: "I am glad that consultations with Parties have made it possible to collectively and quickly agree new dates for COP26. The new dates mean the conference will be at a time when the Covid-19 tragedy will be behind us and we will be able to ensure inclusiveness, for us a fundamental prerequisite for an ambitious COP26 based on global commitment to action".

UN Climate Change Executive Secretary Patricia Espinosa stated: "Our efforts to address climate change and Covid-19 are not mutually exclusive. If done right, the recovery from this crisis can steer us to a more inclusive and sustainable climate path. We honour those whom we have lost by working with renewed commitment and continuing to demonstrate leadership and determination in addressing climate change, and building a safe, clean, just and resilient world".

The May 28th Bureau meeting also shed light on the path regarding the months ahead in 2020, emphasis was put on the many events that are meant to keep the momentum for climate action gathered so far alive: throughout the month of June, the UNFCCC organized a series of virtual meetings and events, under the name of *June Momentum for Climate Change*. Together with U.K. and Italian authorities, UN Deputy Secretary General Amina Mohammed, UNFCCC Executive Secretary Patricia Espinosa, COP25 President Carolina Schmidt and Subsidiary Body Chairs Marianne Karlsen and Tosi Mpanu Mpanu were part of the panel for the online events.

COP26 President Alok Sharma once again made a committed intervention: "[...] As you know we've now got new dates agreed for COP26. I want to thank all colleagues we have taken part in coming to that particular agreement and of course we are working on an ambitious roadmap with partners in the lead up to November 2021. [...] I want to thank all our colleagues: the COP Bureau, our Italian Partners, and everyone who has worked with us in arriving at the new dates for COP26. It gives us a very clear destination and I think that was always very important for us. [...] What we want ahead of COP26 is for all countries to be submitting these ambitious NDCs, committing to further cuts in carbon emissions by 2030. We want countries to set out those longer-term visions for emissions reductions, for ambitious long- term strategies. We are going to work through a whole range of multi-lateral and regional events, the G7, the G20 meetings, the World Bank annual meetings and the upcoming *CBD COP* in China".⁶⁹

Furthermore, President Sharma also spoke at the launch of a new initiative called *Race to Zero* campaign, which also coincided with the *World Environment Day*, on June 5th: "Globally, the cost of wind power has fallen by 49% and that of solar power by 85% since 2010: Renewables are already cheaper than coal power in two-thirds of all countries in the world. This progress was made possible by the countries, companies, cities and regions who

⁶⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/cop26-president-at-opening-of-june-momentum-for-climate-change>

led the way. Shifting investment, spurring innovation, scaling-up technologies and driving down costs. [...] But we must go further, so today the *High-Level Champions* for the UK and Chile, Nigel Topping and Gonzalo Munoz, are launching the ‘Race to Zero’ campaign, urging businesses, investors, cities and regions around the world to commit to reaching *net-zero* by 2050.”⁷⁰

Another notable initiative, designed to retain the momentum and the progress achieved so far in view of COP26, was the *COP26 Business Leaders’ Event*, convened virtually by the Council for Sustainable Business, on June 29th. COP26 President Alok Sharma addressed the audience at the start of the event: “The business community has collectively understood that building a green economy isn’t just good for the environment, it’s actually also good for the bottom line. [...] Ahead of the summit, we have defined five areas which need particular attention: clean energy, clean transport, nature-based solutions, adaptation-resilience and lastly, finance. Your contribution will be central to driving change in these areas”.⁷¹ Then, President Sharma went on to address the businessmen directly, asking them to focus their efforts on the subject through four issues: firstly, he mentioned energy transition, urging businesses to sign up to both the *RE100*, *Powering Past Coal Alliance* and the *Race to Zero Coalition* initiatives; secondly, he asked them to accelerate the development of clean road transport; lastly, President Sharma addressed bankers and the financial realm more broadly, mentioning the *Task Force on Climate-Related Financial Disclosures* agenda.

The month of July 2020 saw many note-worthy events regarding climate diplomacy: from July 1st to 3rd, the first *London Climate Action Week* took place: due to Covid-19, the event was structured in two instalments, the first of which will be convened virtually in July and will focus on finding applicable solutions to the Covid-19 emergency. The second instalment will take place in November, it is designed to widen the climate community beyond policymakers and the financial realm; to convene enough expertise as to extrapolate the necessary data to analyse how the Covid-19 pandemic has interacted with the climate emergency; ultimately, to ensure that the LCAW dialogue will be channeled into the COP26 process next year.⁷²

⁷⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/cop26-president-speech-at-race-to-zero-campaign-launch>

⁷¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/cop26-president-alok-sharma-at-cop26-business-leaders-event>

⁷² <http://sdg.iisd.org/events/london-climate-action-week-digital/>

Chapter 4: How will their joint Diplomatic endeavours shape the future bilateral relationship between the U.K. and Italy?

4.1 Historical background of Anglo-Italian bilateralism

The aim of this chapter is to examine the possibilities that could stem from a closer bilateral relationship between the United Kingdom and Italy, in the post-Brexit context: we want to explore the possibilities that important and far-reaching joint diplomatic endeavours, especially with regards to Climate Diplomacy and Governance such as those analysed within this dissertation, could present the two countries with in the short and medium term; not negligible considerations in my opinion, particularly in the uncertain landscape that Brexit is likely to entail, both legally and geopolitically. To this objective, much attention in this chapter is devoted to identifying the strategic, cultural, commercial and financial reasons underlying the close relationship that these two countries already enjoy, together with the stakes attached to the conduct of successful bilateral diplomacy in the current delicate and somewhat precarious state of European affairs.

As briefly described in the first chapter of this dissertation, the joint endeavour for the organization of the COP26 Conference is but the most recent of close cooperation instances between the two nations taken into account here: the United Kingdom and Italy have traditionally entertained very close and fruitful relations, not only bilaterally, but, more recently with regards to European Union affairs as well. At the turn of the century, the relationship between the then Heads of government at the time, Tony Blair and Silvio Berlusconi, was manifestly a strong one, as the two came to share similar opinions with regards to many aspects of foreign policy and EU policy: for instance, they expressed their common support for the NATO interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, in 2003 they jointly drafted the so-called “Letter of the Eight”, motivating their support of the U.S. policy towards Iraq.⁷³

Also, they shared similar views, in contrast with the majority of E.U. Member States, regarding the highly contentious issue of the United States declaring its opposition to the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court, following the refusal to ratify the Rome Statute by the then President G.W. Bush, in 2002. Moreover, they both embraced and supported talks regarding Turkey’s potential accession to the E.U. in 2004; in essence, the

⁷³ <https://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/168/36565.html>

two maintained a close relationship throughout their terms in office, as was the case in 2009, when Berlusconi publicly endorsed Blair in his candidacy for the post of president of the *European Council*.⁷⁴

Surely, there have also been instances of tension between the two countries, for example, during the Italian presidency of the European Council in 1985, Italy's socialist PM Bettino Craxi was among the protagonists of a proposal to hold Intergovernmental meetings to reform the Treaty of Rome: such proposal was met with the staunch opposition of, among others, British PM Margaret Thatcher.⁷⁵ Furthermore, in 2008, regarding the possibility of U.N. Security Council reform, a matter which at the time saw a significant rift between Germany and Italy, the U.K. stood on Germany's side, encouraging the expansion of permanent membership.⁷⁶

Overall, the U.K. and Italy can be said to share intrinsic values such as the promotion of peace and the guaranteeing of human rights and international security, these in turn account for the actions of these countries in the context of the major international organizations they are part of, such as the U.N. and NATO. The thick web of meetings between representatives of the two countries, not just heads of state but also ministers and officials of various ranks, are a glaring testament to the strength of their relationship. The latter translate into solidly aligned foreign policy, regarding a wide number of items, such as the promotion of democracy, the protection of human rights, the safeguarding of the environment, the fostering of sustainable economic development and, perhaps most importantly, promoting stability in the Mediterranean area.

To this point, Italy and the U.K. have participated jointly in many peacekeeping and anti-terrorism operations, for example they are among the most active contributors to the international coalition against the so-called *Islamic State* (ISIS\Daesh). Among the most recent Anglo-Italian joint initiatives, a declaration of intents to strengthen the strategic cooperation between the two countries' Defence Ministries was signed in July 2018. Moreover, another declaration of intents was signed in March 2019, between the two

⁷⁴ <https://euobserver.com/institutional/28828>

⁷⁵ Dinan, D. 2005. *“Ever Closer Union? An Introduction to European Integration”*. London: Macmillan.

⁷⁶ UK Cabinet Office report; 2008. *The National Security Strategy of the United Kingdom: Security in an interdependent world*.

countries' MFA's, regarding the establishment of a direct platform for strategic dialogues on "issues of mutual interest".⁷⁷

More recently, in 2018, in the context of rising uncertainties with regards to the Brexit negotiations, the then Italian ambassador to the U.K., Pasquale Terracciano, declared with conviction that: "Britain can indeed expect to enjoy a closer future relationship with Italy after Brexit; we intend to maintain a close and fluid bilateral link with the U.K.". Moreover, the ambassador expressed his countries' desire to "intensify relations", in areas such as defence and security, adding that "even at the military level there is a willingness to intensify relations: in the last British military plan we are mentioned for the first time in the leading group with which to have close relations, together with the United States, France and Germany." The senior diplomat also said the Italian position on Brexit has been and will be "constructive, not punitive", also adding: "seeing the UK leave the EU is a loss that should be limited. [...] we are interested in maintaining a close and fluid relationship".⁷⁸

In essence, cooperation between the two countries can be thought of as solid and well-established as of today; despite some instances of what has been termed "promiscuous bilateralism"⁷⁹, albeit one that did not create imperturbable alliances and perennial collaboration, either on European affairs or Foreign affairs⁸⁰, British officials have been shown to regard Italy and their Italian counterparts as among their foremost political partners at the EU level: statistically, since the turn of the century, high-ranking representatives from the two countries met with each other on average 25 to 30 times, outside the realm of European Institutions or events.⁸¹

4.2 The strategic value of a strong post-Brexit Anglo-Italian bilateral relationship

Another significant barometer for Anglo-Italian relationships has been, since 1993, the so-called Pontignano Conference: as described in the first chapter, this event, held in a small town on the outskirts of Siena on a yearly basis by the British Embassy in Rome, the British

⁷⁷ https://amblondra.esteri.it/ambasciata_londra/en/i_rapporti_bilaterali/cooperazione-politica

⁷⁸ <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/910052/brexit-news-uk-italy-trade-deal-leave-european-union-pasquale-terracciano>

⁷⁹ Smith, J. 2005. "A missed opportunity? New Labour's European policy 1997-2005." *International Affairs* issue 81, no. 4: 703-21.

⁸⁰ O'Donnell, C.M., and R.G. Whitman. 2007. "European policy under Gordon Brown: perspectives on a future Prime Minister". *Journal of International Affairs* issue 83, no. 2: 253-72.

⁸¹ Chelotti, N. 2010. "Italy seen through British eyes: a European middle power?" *Modern Italy*, 15 (3). pp. 307-322.

Council and Siena University, is arguably the principal cultural event between the two countries: politicians, diplomats, scholars and businessmen from both countries convene for three days to debate and assess the current dynamics of the thick network of institutions and organizations they are embedded in at any level, the close cooperation in defence and security matters is proof of that, as well as the significant volume of trade between the two countries.

The 2019 Pontignano Conference focused on the main strategic challenges the two countries are confronted with, regarding a broad range of cross-border issues, such as migratory flows and the environment; the theme underlying much of the conference was a key question: what does the future have in store for the international system of rule-based multilateral institutions, as well as the liberal values that characterize it? Delegates from the two countries, pertaining to both the political and the diplomatic sphere, debated whether the western liberal system really is in retreat, or at least deteriorating, leaving space to often populist and sometimes overtly jingoist, inward-looking perspectives.

The opening note of the conference is indeed quite revealing: “[...] rapid technological change - including the advent of Big Data and Artificial Intelligence - is disrupting the old economic paradigm. Trade protectionism is on the rise. On the geopolitical level, the US is pursuing an “America First” policy, while a rising China is exerting ever greater impact on the global stage. We are starting to see the devastating impact of climate change. European nations face demographic decline, while migratory pressures from the developing world are increasing. How should Europe, the UK and Italy navigate this new world? Who do we need as strategic partners, and which strategic threats must we guard against?”⁸²

Many delegates suggested that growing perceptions of inequalities and a deterioration of the supposedly coherent value-set shared by western states, has had the effect of creating a vacuum of influence and soft power, that several other actors could exploit. Indeed, western liberal democracy is perceived as a lot less desirable, when many nations around the world appear to be managing quite well without it. In confronting such issues, particularly that of an increasing lack of trust in the multilateral system, the relevant query inevitably is: should the international community strive to restore confidence in the latter, or to create a different system of international relations?

⁸² <https://www.britishcouncil.it/en/programmes/society/pontignano>

Among the delegates at Pontignano, some agreed that such fragmentation in multilateralism is likely to increase over time, favouring a shift to more bilateral, or partnership-oriented approach to diplomacy and international relations: one in which mid-sized, culturally powerful European powers build coalitional efforts, presumably of a temporary nature, revolving around shared interests and issues; indeed, the Anglo-Italian partnership for the COP26 Conference described in the previous chapters of this research is a textbook example of how this coalitional approach to diplomacy might function in the foreseeable future as well.

For such partnerships to succeed when stakes are high, such is the case with climate action, the common perception among many delegates was that economies like the United Kingdom and Italy, rather than giving in to what is perceived as an increasingly transactional and defensive diplomatic attitude adopted by the G-2 countries, should instead focus on their role as “superpowers” in their projection abroad, their cultural strength and attractiveness, as well as the capacity these countries have to position themselves as credible standard-setters and, most importantly, credible and reliable partners to do business and to entertain cultural relations with.⁸³

In this context, European countries, especially ones like the two examined here, could muster the capabilities needed to represent a third option, with respect to the G-2 countries. However, to do so requires a concerted effort to gather around the shared values that tie these nations together, to promote them with efficacy outside of their borders: in other words, the ability to work jointly to preserve such “value community” and to avoid major frictions between “old” and “new”, traditional and emerging power-bases, could very well prove essential to both the preservation of European influence around the globe, as well as the restoration of a somewhat rule-based international system.

To that purpose, the British and Italian delegates at Pontignano have worked closely to identify, amidst all the political turmoil and speculations revolving around the Brexit negotiations, the long-term shared values that connect the two countries, looking to increase opportunities to restore and encourage trust (especially that of the youth) in the international institutions these two nations heavily contributed to create in the first place. Cooperation at the COP26 Conference has been heralded as a dear first step in this direction, as well as

⁸³ <https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/insight-articles/anglo-italian-collaboration>

representing the latest evidence of the solid foundations the relationship between the two countries stand upon.

4.3 Evaluating the statistical evidence

There is also quite a large amount of evidence to the mutual sense of attraction between the citizens of the two countries themselves (undoubtedly an encouraging sign in the direction here suggested), as several recent research has shown: for instance, the findings of a survey (the second of its kind one year on) conducted by the notable Trieste-based market research firm SWG, titled *Italians and the U.K.*, presented on September 24th, 2019, in conjunction with the above-mentioned 27th Pontignano Conference, at the official residence of the U.K. Ambassador to Italy Ms. Jill Morris, showed a renewed affinity towards the British Isles and their inhabitants, notwithstanding the difficult predicaments of the current political situation regarding the historic withdrawal from the E.U.

In essence, the vast majority of Italians surveyed deemed appropriate for the close relationship between the two countries to continue in the future, particularly in areas as specific as: research and innovation (82 per cent), trade and investment (81 per cent), culture (78 per cent) and lastly, climate, sustainability and energy (77 per cent); interestingly, 57 per cent of respondents believed Brexit to be a bad choice (compared to just over 45 per cent in 2018). Also, about 70 per cent of those surveyed are of the opinion that Brexit will not affect their willingness or ability to visit the U.K. on account of tourism, study, or business. In commenting the figures above, Ambassador Morris expressed her satisfaction: “It is certainly grounds for great pride that, among Italians who are living across the Channel at this time - a growing number compared to last year - as many as 86 per cent - speak positively about their current experience in the UK. Beyond any positive signal, I want to underline the hope that Italians have expressed for the future, that our bilateral collaboration continues to be strong”.

Moreover, the preliminary findings of the British Council’s *Next Generation Italy* research, announced in January 2020 (the full results of which are due to be published in September 2020), are said to have revealed striking similarities between young Italian and Britons, as well as an appetite for cooperation between them, also confirmed by the Council’s recent *Powers of Attraction* report, with “cooperation and tolerance” figuring as the second most important value among young adults in the two countries (aged 18 to 30). The same research also presented intriguing figures with respect to the countries the above-mentioned segment of the population finds most attractive: the U.K. ranks number one with regards to the

European nation young Italians are attracted to the most, followed by France and Germany; such stance is reciprocal, young Britons identified Italy as the most attractive G-20 country, again over France and Germany.⁸⁴

All of the above seem to suggest that bilateral cooperation in addressing some of the global challenges with which both countries are faced as of today, is likely to maintain its popularity, regardless of the perceived growth of nativism and anti-globalist reactions to many current issues, signalled in Italy by the electoral success of “populist” political realities. However, another similarity that young adults in the two countries have in common is that of appearing less trusting of national institutions and more likely to join public protests than their peers in other E.U. member states, as evidenced by the specular British Council report on the U.K., *Next Generation U.K.*⁸⁵

In short, the latter confirmed the uncertainty regarding the future felt by young adults in the United Kingdom, the current situation left them questioning their country’s place in the world, or at least how they could reframe it. While some of the respondents were confident about opportunities stemming from Brexit, many felt anxiety about it diminishing the country’s influence in world affairs, especially with such grand-scale changes on the way. Also, the research revealed widespread concern on the part of young Britons, regarding the possibility to travel, study or work in Europe: many fear these avenues will be curtailed as a consequence of the UK withdrawing from the E.U.; the viability of such undertakings was already considered an obstacle financially. Guarantees about post-Brexit rights of students or workers within E.U. member states, as well as visa procedures, are all uncertain and contentious matters at this stage of the negotiations.

4.4 The cultural value of a strong post-Brexit Anglo-Italian bilateral relationship

Coming to a different perspective relative to the rapport between the two countries object of this study, namely cultural relations between the U.K. and Italy, it is easy to ascertain how the latter have prospered as of late thanks to a diffused cooperation between public authorities, the academia, research institutes and private companies in both countries; the large Italian community in the U.K. (currently attested at about 700.000 units), together with the

⁸⁴https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/j136_thought_leadership_g20_perceptions_196x284mm_final_web_v3.pdf

⁸⁵ https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/h030_next_generation_uk_report_final_web.pdf

Consulates General and the Italian cultural institutes in both London and Edinburgh, are responsible for strengthening cultural ties between the two countries. Evidence of such ties is that Italian is the fifth most studied language in British schools and universities, with growing demand also in the business realm; the latter can be due to many factors: surely the large Italian community in the United Kingdom seeking to retain and preserve its cultural heritage, perhaps the irrefutable reputation of Italian as a timeless language of culture, an access to the yearned Italian lifestyle.⁸⁶

Furthermore, in the context of close cooperation and cultural exchanges between the two countries, one particular event in 2020 is worth examining: the so-called *U.K.-Italy Season 2020*; a series of digital events taking place in Italy, from September to November 2020. Organized by the British Council, such occasion represents an enticing opportunity to deepen cultural connections between the cultural and artistic sectors of both countries; the Season will gather leading professionals and scholars, economists, funders and patrons, with the objective of understanding the challenges currently faced by the cultural sector, but also to identify future growth opportunities.⁸⁷

Undoubtedly, the Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on this sector as well, thus forcing the organizers to rethink the above-mentioned event, restructuring it in a digital form. The official program was announced in July; within the latter, two events are of particular relevance in my opinion: firstly, the so-called *Culture Salons*, which will stretch throughout the Season (September to November 2020), in the words of the organizers: “the Culture Salons series as part of the Season marks an important step in securing the sustainability of the bilateral cultural relationship and will have legacy beyond 2020”. Moreover, on September 30th, the integral results of the *Next Generation Italy* research will be presented to the public. Essentially, the aim of such ambitious project is to assess the social and economic impact of the cultural sectors on the two countries’ societies.⁸⁸

4.5 The economic value of strong post-Brexit Anglo-Italian bilateral relationship

Another important aspect in guaranteeing a strong bilateral link between the U.K. and Italy is unequivocally the economic realm: in 2019, Italy figured as the ninth-largest trading partner for the U.K., eighth with regards to exports to the U.K. and seventh concerning imports from

⁸⁶ https://amblondra.esteri.it/ambasciata_londra/en/i_rapporti_bilaterali/cooperazione-culturale/

⁸⁷ <https://www.britishcouncil.org/ukitaly-2020>

⁸⁸ <https://www.britishcouncil.it/en/programmes/uk-italy>

the U.K. Conversely, the U.K. is tenth among the countries Italy imports from and fifth regarding countries to which it exports. Overall, Italy has a healthy trade surplus of £9.66bn with the United Kingdom (£19.4bn of exports, 4.2% growth; £9.2bn of imports, 3% degrowth), with exports to the U.K. growing steadily since 2012. There is also a high degree of investment from both countries into each other, especially in fields such as energy, defence and security or fashion and design.⁸⁹

The importance of establishing a clear, mutually beneficial post-Brexit economic partnership between the two countries can be found in a study conducted by *ICE-Prometeia* (the Italian trade and investment agency), attesting potential Brexit-related losses for the Italian export sector, at between 4% and 21% of total exports (between €800m and €4bn), based on the kind of economic partnership that will emerge, meaning losses could very well be contained in the best-case scenario, or amplified in the worst-case one.⁹⁰

Indeed, the latter shows the degree of concerns over strong bilateral economic links between the two COP26 hosts, especially with regards to the post-Brexit context, which is not being underestimated by any means: already on February 4th, 2020, the Presidents of the *British Chamber of Commerce for Italy* (BCCI) Tom Noad, together with his Italian counterpart from the *Italian Chamber of Commerce for the U.K.* (ICCIUK) Alessandro Belluzzo, organized a conference by the title: *The future of trade relations between the U.K. and Italy*, in collaboration with many relevant stakeholders, both public and private, for example the *Under-Secretary of State for the Italian MFA*, On. Ivan Scalfarotto, or the *KPMG Head of International trade & customs services*, Massimo Fabio, just to name a few.

Another such conference was organized between the respective chambers of commerce on September 8th, 2020, in order to clarifying the details of post-Brexit trade relations between the two countries; to that objective precisely, the Presidents of both Chambers of Commerce were present at the conference. In sum, the goal for each Chamber was to support its own members, as well as assisting them by ensuring clarity in referring to all the relevant issues that could potentially arise after Brexit is finalized, such as: taxes, customs procedures, transport issues, data protection, contract jurisdiction and employees abroad, as well as many other.⁹¹

⁸⁹ https://amblondra.esteri.it/ambasciata_londra/en/i_rapporti_bilaterali/cooperazione-economica

⁹⁰ <https://www.ice.it/it/node/6220>

⁹¹ <https://britishchamber.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/ICCIUK-Presentation-8-9-2020.pdf>

The financial sector is of course another central issue tying to the bilateral relations between the U.K. and Italy, particularly with regards to the *City of London Stock Exchange*, among the most important financial hubs on the planet, used as investment platform by many non-European investors, such as Asian and North American ones. Also, many Italian banks operate in this context, such as *Unicredit*, *Intesa-San Paolo*, *IMI* and *Mediobanca*, as well as many Italian private equity funds. These institutes, coupled with the acquisition of *Borsa Italiana* by the London Stock Exchange back in 2007, represent crucial pillars of the close financial integration between the two countries.

Moreover, the Brexit process currently under way has inevitably presented observers with the task of predicting the dynamics that potential disruptions in the vast financial apparatus based in *the City* (as of today the largest financial hub on the planet), might bring about, particularly in the form of transferring operations to other major centres in the European landscape; the increasing probability that the U.K. will abruptly leave the ESM and that clarity over financial arrangements will only be achieved at the tail-end of the negotiation period, forced financial insiders to look for possibilities to transfer operations elsewhere. In this sense, it has recently been argued that a handful of such financial centres, Milan or Frankfurt just to name a few, are likely to benefit considerably from the fragmenting of the London financial infrastructure, although such possibility entails the overcoming of many difficulties, be them of a regulatory, legal or logistical nature.

Regarding such considerations, Italy and the city of Milan in particular have recently received much attention from financial operators in the U.K.; the Italian Embassy in London has been engaging in steady dialogue with stakeholders at the many levels in the financial community of the British capital. Also, the Embassy has patronized several diplomatic initiatives to provide operators with a clear picture of the investment possibilities in Italy: these in turn have recognized the value of the structural reforms currently under implementation in Italy.

Conclusion:

This research was intended as an analysis of the diplomatic process that led to the substantial formulation of a partnership endeavour between the United Kingdom and Italy, regarding the hosting of the COP26 Conference and related events; the introductory chapter was devoted to laying out the normative foundations and the rationale for the above-mentioned bilateral initiative within the multilateral Climate Diplomacy process. Borrowing from the theoretical work of notable scholars such as Joseph Nye, I have argued that a political parallel could be found between the commitment to the so-called *climate action* as of today, with respect to the participation in peacekeeping operations and/or humanitarian interventions in the recent past: that is to say, the *soft power* capabilities of a given State in the last twenty or thirty years (and indeed also that of political institutions or private actors) can be found to be greatly enhanced (but conversely also negatively affected) by the propensity (or lack thereof) to embrace the latter, which is to be regarded, for all intents and purposes, as a pivotal “yardstick” in the perception of one’s international status. Notwithstanding such hard fact, part of the introductory chapter has been dedicated to an overview of alarming recent developments in Climate Diplomacy: in particular, much emphasis was placed on the examination of the current settings pertaining to the latter, namely the current stalemate in climate negotiations (if there ever was an intent to negotiate) between the so-called G2 countries, meaning the U.S. and China (and their offshoots); the latter in turn, many observers argued, has set a dangerous precedent that in essence allowed the proliferation of many “climate laggards” around the globe.

Prior to assessing the constraints that the latter presents and the obstacles it poses to the advancement of a common climate agenda, I devoted some attention to a brief historical overview of Climate Diplomacy, from its very inception into the diplomatic realm through the historical *Rio Declaration* of 1992, to the more recent development of the *Paris Agreement* in 2015. I then went on to introduce the ambitious proposal by the United Kingdom, in partnership with Italy, to host the next Conference of the Parties (COP26) and its related events, as part of a wider synergy between the two countries also in the context of G7/G20 diplomacy. The partial rationale for this, corroborated by various geopolitical observers, being the need to better assert a post-Brexit diplomatic and strategic role for the United Kingdom, as well as the willingness to secure assurances for the nearly 700.000 Italian nationals currently living in the U.K. and clarity regarding the post-Brexit commercial and financial settings for Italy; however, I have argued, the commitment to the environment

by the two European powers taken into account here has always been a strong and assertive one, beyond any reasonable doubt.

I then went on to exhaustively describe the intense diplomatic networks between the two countries, both at the institutional and private level, leading to the formulation of the above-mentioned bid for COP26, which was accepted and ratified at the COP25 Conference in December 2019. I then focused on the intense diplomatic and indeed technical process that stemmed from this result and that established the relevant architecture and organizational chart for the COP26 Conference and the many related and side events. Such process was still feverishly under way when, in the early days of March 2020, it grinded to a halt due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 global pandemic. Such troubled and uncertain scenario threatened to further disrupt and fragment the already stalemating Climate Diplomacy process, which is not only presently endangered by the G2 reluctance to give in to the scientific evidence of the unsustainability of current economic and commercial practices, but also by the predatory stance of many emerging economies such as Brazil or Australia (just to name a few), whose attitude is one of taking advantage of the pandemic to avoid addressing the climate disaster looming ahead. In acknowledging the necessity not to divert too many resources and attention away from the response to the pandemic, as well as the difficulty to address technical issues connected with the latter, such as the impact of the pandemic on the availability of resources for climate financing or the disruptions in the regulatory system for carbon markets, I interrogated myself on the possibilities to effectively and realistically address such issues; in doing so I stumbled upon an interesting piece of research born out of a synergy between scholars from the *Euro-Mediterranean center for Climate Change*, the *Ca'Foscari university* of Venice and the *University College of London*, which envisioned a “Digital COP” as a way to assist the workings of the Conference and to navigate the difficulties arising from the pandemic.

In this unprecedented scenario, combining a structural problem with an incidental one as big as a global pandemic, many analysts and scholars alike started to question whether there could be a viable alternative to the traditional multilateral fora in which Climate Diplomacy has been conducted so far; rather than giving in to the deadlock represented by domestic limitations either in Washington or Beijing, I have taken inspiration from a plethora of academic contributions to the literature on the so-called “regime complex” in the context of Climate Diplomacy, such as the work of R. Keohane and D. Victor, or that of T. Hale on *coalition-building*; which have prompted me to explore the possibility of a coalitional effort

spearheaded by the United Kingdom and Italy, taking advantage of their joint endeavour for COP26, as well as their respective incoming presidencies of G7 and G20 summits. The latter finds vindication in the eye-opening data regarding the amount of *Climate Action* initiatives at the sub-national, local and private level, within even the most climate reluctant countries such as the United States and China, the figures of which reveal a deep-seated willingness to act on environmental concerns, despite the attitudes adopted by their respective governments.

In order to corroborate such hypothesis, I turned to a revealing recent piece of research from B. Kilian and O. Elgström: the two scholars examined the role taken by the European Union in the context of Climate Diplomacy, arguing that prior to the recent shift in geopolitical power in favour of emerging powers such as those pertaining to the *BASIC* group for example, the E.U. managed to retain a leadership position in the conduct of environmental negotiations; they then analysed the Union's role in Climate Diplomacy in the new millennium, demonstrating how such leadership position had been greatly diluted, culminating in the demonstrably negative performance of the E.U. in the context of the COP15 Conference in Copenhagen, in which the Union's attempt at obtaining a universally-binding agreement, too norm-driven and politically ingenuous, naively failed to recognize the geopolitical implications of a collusion between the U.S. and the *BASIC* group: they went on to hammer out a deal bereft of any kind of credible emission reductions or timetables, having left the E.U. substantially isolated. Kilian and Elgström argued that such dismal performance in Copenhagen provided a wake-up call for the European Union: it now had to come face to face with the changing power distribution in environmental negotiations, which resulted in an important strategic shift, from a normative and ideational stance to a more realist and structural one, taking notice of changes in power relations and thus prioritizing coalition-building and gap-bridging; the latter proved pivotal for the success obtained by the European Union at COP17 in Durban: by making its endorsement of a renewed Kyoto Protocol (KP-II) conditional on the stipulation of a clear roadmap towards legally binding commitments by major polluters, while simultaneously making progress in forming an alliance with the AOSIS group and the African group, the Union managed to perform much better than it did in Copenhagen. Although it must be said that such coalition was unequivocally facilitated by a rift among the *BASIC* group countries and the Small Islands, but was equally aided by the European efforts, prior to the conference, to enter into informal coalitions outside the realm of the U.N. structure.

The central argument of this thesis, namely the construction of a coalitional effort large and incisive enough as to represent a viable second-best alternative to classical multilateral negotiations, is accompanied by another, perhaps subordinate but not less significant argument, introduced in the last chapter of the research, that is to envision the extent to which the joint diplomatic efforts between the two countries here discussed could shape their future short and medium term bilateral relationship, especially in light of Brexit: such argument rests on several aspects: I first looked at the many historical instances of strong bilateralism between the U.K. and Italy, as well as those instances of friction between them. I then turned to the sizable amount of statistical evidence, provided by many sources, regarding the mutual sense of attraction between the citizens of the two countries, particularly with regards to the youth. The latter provided me with the possibility to envision the strategic, cultural, financial and commercial value of a strong Anglo-Italian bilateralism in the aftermath of the U.K.'s withdrawal from the European Union: regarding geopolitics, the argument is not a new one literature-wise: European countries, especially ones like the two examined here, should strive to muster the capabilities needed to represent a third option with respect to the G-2 countries. However, to do so requires, among other things, a concerted effort to gather around the shared values that somewhat tie these nations together, to promote them with efficacy outside of their borders: in other words, the ability to work jointly to preserve such “value community” and to avoid major frictions between the “old” and the “new”, traditional and emerging power-bases, could very well prove essential to both the preservation of European influence around the globe, as well as the restoration of a somewhat rule-based international system. Culturally, the statistical evidence here provides a clear picture: the two countries figure top of the list with regard to the attraction of their cultures and values on the citizens of the other, the preferred travel destinations and other related aspects. Regarding the financial and commercial importance of a strong Anglo-Italian bilateralism, in the absence of a concerted post-Brexit economic regime, statistical evidence illustrates the potential losses for both countries would be much worse. Moreover, clear-cut benefits could accrue to financial hubs such as Milan or Frankfurt, in the context of a fragmentation of the London financial realm, provided they will be able to navigate the regulatory, legal and logistical challenges.

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Summary:

This research focuses on the upcoming 26th *United Nations Climate Change Conference* (COP26), which will be presided jointly by the United Kingdom and Italy in November 2021, after a one year postponement following the global disruptions that have been brought about by the *Covid-19* pandemic; the principal aim here is to envision the partnership between the two above-mentioned countries as a bilateral effort to try and address the current relevant issues within what is substantially a multilateral setting in and of itself, namely global *Climate Diplomacy*. The introduction is aimed at highlighting the more pressing current difficulties in the realm of Climate Diplomacy negotiations, as well as to briefly recount the contemporary evolution of the latter: it has been widely recognized that as of today, environmental commitments have ascended to a prominent role within the wider diplomatic context; here, we draw from the much influential work of Joseph Nye on soft power, in portraying commitment to the so-called *Climate Action* as a yardstick, and a significant one at that, of a country's gravity in the international scenario: the United Nations especially epitomize this concept, whereby motions and initiatives related to either specific or principle-guided climate objectives have proliferated in the last few decades, undoubtedly inspired by goodwill, but equally undoubtedly aimed at increasing one's prestige and soft power; in that sense, pledges related to cutting carbon emissions or resources poured in adaptation and mitigation projects represent today what contributing to peacekeeping operations or conflict mediation represented some thirty or twenty years ago, in the right proportions of course.

However, notwithstanding the strategic and political positives connected with climate action highlighted above, the reality of the situation is more complicated and multifaceted than that, especially when considering the "heavyweights" emitters, particularly the so-called *G2* nations, (a concept first coined by notable economist C.F. Bergsten) namely the United States or China: I therefore analysed the internal political and economic constraints that render official governmental commitments by these countries virtually impossible for the time being. In short, the situation depicted above has been a reality for at least two decades, as many observers and political scientist have argued: whilst there are foreseeable benefits in developing greener technologies now, the short-term costs remain unacceptably high politics-wise; both concerning Chinese autocrats and American elected officials. Also, internal blockages in the two countries contribute to reinforcing each other's. Having said all of the above, it would be foolish to think that any deal not involving the U.S. or China at all, (be it their official governments or other entities) which taken together represent almost half of the

world's *greenhouse gases* (GHG) emissions, could be worth the effort to strike it. Moreover, not only do the G-2 represent the most glaring and crucial barrier to an ambitious global response to climate change, it must also be said that they provide, albeit indirectly, a practical excuse for other governments not to take concrete action.

The first chapter then presents a brief historical background related to Climate Diplomacy, prior to illustrating the key points in the diplomatic path that led to the above-mentioned U.K./Italy COP26 partnership. Shortly, The story of environmental negotiations and the various undertakings of those involved in the latter, be it public or private actors, is a relatively recent one: one could argue that it does not go back more than some 40-odd years, starting with the rudimentary 1972 *Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment*. At the 21st *United Nations Climate Change Conference*, commonly referred to as *COP21*, held in Paris from November 30 to December 12, 2015, the Parties to the 1992 *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (UNFCCC) and signatories of the 1992 *Rio Declaration*, as well as to the 1997 *Kyoto Protocol* produced at COP3, adopted the so-called *Paris Agreement*, a new legally-binding framework for a globally coordinated endeavour to combat harmful climate change. The Agreement represented at the time the end-goal of six years of strenuous climate change negotiations under the patronage of the UNFCCC, reached under a good deal of scepticism and intense international pressure to avoid a failure similar to that of the *Copenhagen Conference* in 2009. To that goal, the Agreement defined a mechanism of *Nationally Determined Contributions* (NDC) that each signatory should communicate to the Secretariat, that is because the rationale of the Paris Agreement is related to processes rather than fixed mitigation and adaptation goals, which is also consistent with the above-mentioned trend of environmental protection as an effective soft power instrument. The Agreement poses a preamble dedicated to the different positions of countries with regards to their polluting power and factor endowments, hence their responsibilities: enshrined in the principles of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities in light of different circumstances (Art. 2.2).

As of December 2019, on the occasion of COP25 in Madrid, the United Kingdom, in partnership with Italy, succeeded in an ambitious bid for the Presidency of the next Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, commonly referred to as COP26; to say that the U.K. has strongly advocated for its presidency of the Conference also in light of geopolitical concerns about its post-Brexit international position isn't at all far-fetched in my opinion. Indeed, many notable observers alluded to the same

concept, such as in a recent article from the *British Foreign Policy Group*. The proposal for the above-mentioned U.K.-Italy partnership for COP26 was first announced on June 18th, 2019, through a joint statement summarizing the gist of their bid for the presidency: “The United Kingdom and Italy have today agreed to present a proposal for the UK to assume the Presidency of the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in partnership with Italy. Building on previous proposals, the UK offers to host the COP and Italy the pre-COP event [...]”. I then discussed the wide array of initiatives, ranging from the governmental level to the academia and the private sector, connected to COP26, as well as dedicating much of the first chapter to the structuring of the relevant organigram and to the analysis of the proceedings for the Conference, from its announcement in December 2019 at COP25, to the abrupt halt represented by the *Covid-19* pandemic.

I then go on to argue that, given the current international climate diplomacy scenario, in which the two largest emitters of *Greenhouse Gases* (namely the United States and China, which together account for more than 40% of global emissions), refuse to take the lead in limiting the rise in global temperatures to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, as the 2015 Paris Agreement envisioned; the most feasible and perhaps the only plausible solution is that of an ambitious coalitional effort, in which the U.K. and Italy, through their joint hosting of the COP26 Conference and related ministerial meetings, subsidiary bodies meetings and related events, as well as their upcoming *G7* and *G20* Presidencies respectively, pursue the establishment and nurturing of a *coalition of willing actors* wide enough as to possess the capabilities to achieve the necessary long-term positive results: to emphasize the possibilities of such an effort, I have put forth a case study drawing from an interesting research by notable scholars K. Bäckstrand and O. Elgström, who argued that the European Union has been undisputedly leading the charge in climate diplomacy, already since the 1997 Kyoto Protocol; however, it has consistently done so through multilateralism rather than bilaterally or via smaller forums, be it coalitional or “minilateral”.

By contrast, the E.U. was not as successful in amassing support for a Kyoto Protocol successor agreement: put succinctly, it did not realize the changes in relative power of major emitters in the new millennium, especially in the developing world. A recurrent argument among scholars is that the 2009 COP15 Conference in Copenhagen symbolizes the failure of European multilateral climate leadership: in short, the Union’s bid for a single global agreement, binding on all parties, was isolated by the U.S. and the BASIC group, who then

went on to hammer out a deal which lacked binding emission limiting targets or timetables. The European attempt at crafting a legally-binding universal agreement was hailed by many observers as too norm-driven and politically ingenuous, unsuited for the realist dynamics of the context, one dictated by short-sightedness and self-interest among the parties involved. Some have argued that its dismal performance in Copenhagen provided a wake-up call for the European Union: it now had to come face to face with the changing power distribution in environmental negotiations, which resulted in an important strategic shift, from a normative and ideational stance to a more realist and structural one, taking notice of changes in power relations and thus prioritizing coalition-building and gap-bridging. Scholars have captured such change in role through the notion of the E.U. as *leadiator*, that is a leader and a mediator, working along, rather than against, the mentioned changing geopolitical landscape. Indeed, the European Union entered negotiations at COP17 in Durban by making its endorsement of a renewed Kyoto Protocol (*KP-II*) conditional on the stipulation of a clear roadmap towards legally binding commitments by major polluters, while simultaneously making progress in forming an alliance with the AOSIS group and the African group: such coalition was unequivocally facilitated by a rift among the BASIC group countries and the Small Islands, but was equally aided by the European efforts, prior to the conference, to enter into informal coalitions outside the realm of the U.N. structure .

So, while a worldwide, multilateral treaty of the kind sought by the European Union at Copenhagen or Cancun would surely be the best option to tackle climate change, the best option, as argued above, is not currently available; the argument here goes as follows: even in the midst of a global pandemic, the situation of deadlock in multilateralism regarding environmental protection and climate diplomacy does not mean that we ought to relinquish to the dangerous effects of climate change, nor that we must accept the *ipse dixit* limitations in domestic politics either in Washington or Beijing. On the contrary, to try and make do in a time of stalemate in multilateral efforts, means to construct a coalition of willing actors: one through which the international community might still, *in absentia* of an idyllic solution (namely a defining, all-encompassing multilateral treaty), make worthy, albeit somewhat expedient, progress aimed at the substantial mitigation of climate change.

The latter would encompass all those countries, sub-national units such as regions, provinces, cities, as well as governmental agencies and private actors, from the corporate to the individual spectrum, that are willing to strive for the kind of GHG limitations needed to make serious advancements. In the later sections of chapter two, I availed myself with several

studies regarding the impressive (and somewhat counter-intuitive) amount of trans-national and sub-national environmental initiatives both in the U.S. and China, in order to make the case for the possibilities that could be vested in institutions other than these countries' official governments. Moreover, I drew on many scholarly sources on coalitions and coalition-building, detailing the structure, characteristics, roles and functions a diplomatic coalition can take. It has been argued that coalitions, as ad-hoc constructed networks, arising within multilateral settings, composed of actors with differing interests and priorities, yet having some degree of commonality in their aspirations, can reduce the sophistications of multilateral negotiations, as well as enhancing the weight of participants by bringing together previously dispersed forces, thus representing a valuable alternative in some instances. Taken together, all of the above-mentioned actors make up what scholars and analysts call the "regime complex" for the environment, meaning the collection of attempts at climate governance by public and private, large and minute entities (although the original connotation did not account for private entities). In essence, with the "traditional" multilateral approach stalled, policymakers and stakeholders alike ought to look at this wider array of climate governance instruments, in order to amass enough momentum to take such non-multilateral perspective to such a scale where they can effectively make a difference with regards to the issue at hand, but perhaps, as others have argued, also help to lay the foundations to restore some groundwork for a functioning multilateralism.

The third chapter focuses on the diplomatic process related to shaping and solidifying the structure of the envisioned climate coalition of the willing. I then returned to the workings in view of the COP26 Conference: focusing on the main diplomatic and indeed technical difficulties the UK and Italy will have to face in navigating the disruptions imposed on all of us by the Covid-19 pandemic, therefore illustrating the process related to seeking out a pathway to ensure a significant and successful COP26, as well as all the related events, notwithstanding the current situation of uncertainty and unprecedented challenges. Regarding the construction of said coalitional effort, the U.K. and Italy devoted particular attention to bilateral relations with countries that, in the above-mentioned "mini-lateral" context, could very well tilt the balance in a deal not involving the G-2 official governments: Australia, Brazil, India, Malaysia, Mexico and the Pacific Islands, concerning the United Kingdom; African and Latin American countries with respect to Italy. In fact, throughout 2019 and 2020, as the proceedings for the organization of COP26 got under way, the two hosting countries did not lose time in strengthening ties with the aforementioned countries. With

regard to the workings for the COP26 Conference, severely curtailed by the Covid-19 pandemic, I analysed the work of many observers who argued for the establishment of digital equivalents of the institutions and events carrying out Climate Diplomacy, detailing coping mechanisms and initiatives, as well as those aimed at retaining the momentum for COP26, from the onset of the pandemic in late February 2020, to the official rescheduling and the ramping up of proceedings during the summer.

The central argument of this thesis, namely the construction of a coalitional effort large and incisive enough as to represent a viable second-best alternative to classical multilateral negotiations, is accompanied by another, perhaps subordinate but not less significant argument, introduced in the fourth and last chapter of the research, that is to envision the extent to which the joint diplomatic efforts between the two countries here discussed could shape their future short and medium term bilateral relationship, especially in light of the impending Brexit. Such argument rests on several aspects: I first looked at the many historical instances of strong bilateralism between the U.K. and Italy, as well as those instances of friction between them. I then turned to the sizable amount of statistical evidence, provided by many sources, regarding the mutual sense of attraction between the citizens of the two countries, particularly with regards to the youth.

The latter provided me with the possibility to envision the strategic, cultural, financial and commercial value of a strong Anglo-Italian bilateralism in the aftermath of the U.K.'s withdrawal from the European Union: regarding geopolitics, the argument is not a new one literature-wise: European countries, especially ones like the two examined here, should strive to muster the capabilities needed to represent a third option with respect to the G-2 countries. However, to do so requires, among other things, a concerted effort to gather around the shared values that somewhat tie these nations together, to promote them with efficacy outside of their borders: in other words, the ability to work jointly to preserve such “value community” and to avoid major frictions between the “old” and the “new”, traditional and emerging power-bases, could very well prove essential to both the preservation of European influence around the globe, as well as the restoration of a somewhat rule-based international system. Culturally, the statistical evidence here provides a clear picture: the two countries figure top of the list with regard to the attraction of their cultures and values on the citizens of the other, the preferred travel destinations and other related aspects. Regarding the financial and commercial importance of a strong Anglo-Italian bilateralism, in the absence of a concerted post-Brexit economic regime, statistical evidence illustrates the potential losses for

both countries would be much worse. Moreover, clear-cut benefits could accrue to financial hubs such as Milan or Frankfurt, in the context of a fragmentation of the London financial realm, provided they will be able to navigate the regulatory, legal and logistical challenges.