



Corso di laurea in International Relations

Cattedra **Geopolitical Scenarios and Political Risk**

The Crisis Unit of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: diplomacy and cooperation in crisis management, case-study on covid-19

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Introduction

The present research is aimed at analysing the Crisis Unit of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, focusing on its action in context of crises. The methodology adopted is analytical: which are the geopolitical implications that arise from crises? The Crisis Unit operates within this framework, in conjunction with other State's administrations.

The intention of the author is to demonstrate the responsiveness of the Unit in managing crises, that are shaping international order in terms of geopolitical perspective.

Global crises crumble the balance of international order, resulting in catastrophic geopolitical consequences; geopolitics have always played a crucial role in determining historical events and shaping international relations. After the brutalities of World War II, international order was established upon international cooperation between States as a tool for avoiding interstate disputes, with the consequent marginalisation of the resort to violence and military aggression. Cooperation has been functional for the maintenance of peace and international security: if States cooperate with each other in all possible issue areas, in the name of common interests, they will not be pushed to wage war, in most cases. Since the Peace of Westphalia (1648), when the modern international order was conceived ¹, the balance of power on international scale has held for more than four centuries. However today, the operating system of the institutions through which global governance is exercised has never been so close to the brink. Only in the last decade, the world has witnessed the break out of emergencies as climate change, the war in Ukraine, Covid-19 pandemic, which are all crises that pose severe threats to international security. Mankind is probably crossing a transition phase ², in which global order seems overturned, and the future geopolitical scenarios are not favourable.

¹ Kissinger H., *Global Order*, Penguin Books (2014)

² Secretary General Amb. Ettore F. Sequi, *Statistical Yearbook*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (2022)

With this regard, diplomacy is a valuable tool for States to safeguard their interests around the world, since much of the global governance is exercised through diplomacy, as the essential instrument that represents the projection of foreign policy at international level.

The first chapter takes into consideration the structure of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, its functions and scope of jurisdiction, in order to comprehend the architecture in which the Crisis Unit operates, in relation to the diplomatic network, with a brief preamble on the four dimensions that characterize Italian foreign policy.

In the second chapter, the research focuses on the Crisis Unit itself: its mission is to guarantee the protection of Italian citizens abroad, since its staff is specifically trained to cope with crisis situations, as the most suitable persons to communicate with the parents of the victims, for instance; they are representatives of the State, civil servants. Further, the first paragraph relates to crisis management: in this respect, the elements to focus on are risk assessment, planning, operational intervention, and prevention strategies, key-tools for the Crisis Unit; in fact, with regards to prevention strategies, this chapter analyses also the services delivered by the Unit, as *Viaggiare Sicuri* and *Dove Siamo Nel Mondo*.

Ultimately, the third chapter presents the case-study relating to the management of Covid-19 emergency by the Crisis Unit, whose information have been acquired through in-depth research inside the Crisis Unit deriving from the personal experience of the author, that had the chance to visit and to meet the permanent staff of the Unit.

Covid triggered a series of crisis, as a multiplier of emergency, both at regional and global level: the key-assumption is that the recovery from Covid-19 determines the future geopolitical order³. It will be provided practical cases and official documents regarding the repatriation of Italian citizens that, due to the spread of the virus and to the closure of borders, were not able to return to Italy. The Crisis Unit, in synergy with numerous institutions (other Ministries, police forces, other national institutions, foreign

³ S. Brannen, *Four Scenarios for Geopolitical Order in 2025-2030: What Will Great Power Competition Look Like?*, Center for Strategic & International Studies (2020) (link <https://www.csis.org/analysis/four-scenarios-geopolitical-order-2025-2030-what-will-great-power-competition-look>)

authorities), mobilized every resources in its capability for rescuing the lives of thousand people stuck in foreign countries.

As the UN Secretary General formidably underlined, “Covid-19 pandemic has laid bare the world’s fragilities; we can only address them together today. We have a surplus of multilateral challenges and the deficit of multilateral solutions”⁴.

⁴ UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, during the 75th anniversary of the San Francisco Conference (21st September 2020)

1 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

1.1 Foreign Policy and Diplomacy

The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, located at Palazzo della Farnesina in Rome, is charged with developing the foreign policy of the government of the Italian Republic: it represents the projection of Italian politics in the world. Its functions mainly concern Italy's political, economic, cultural and social bonds with foreign institutions (namely countries and international organizations)⁵.

The foreign policy of the Italian Republic, whose manifestation is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is articulated along four main dimensions, in conformity with its history and in accomplishment to its international commitments⁶:

- European dimension – Italy has been one of the founding members of the ECSC (European Coal and Steel Community, established by the Treaty of Paris in 1951), that represented the first footstep in the establishment of the European community;
- North-Atlantic dimension – probably the most important one, it is considered by many scholars as the cornerstone of the Italian security policy⁷, that is enforced and highly protected by the North-Atlantic Treaty Organization, despite its changing and controversial nature in the last decades;
- Mediterranean dimension – due to geography, the Mediterranean area has always been crucial to Italy⁸, in terms of energy suppliers, trade, fishery, but also as a peacemaking actor with regards to the unstable countries⁹;

⁵ S. Baldi, *Ministero degli Affari Esteri Guida alla Farnesina*, DGRI Istituto Diplomatico, ISDI Press, 2012

⁶ F. Coticchia, A. Ruggeri, *An International Peacekeeper. The Evolution of Italian Foreign and Defence Policy*, ISPI Publications & Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (2022) (link <https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaip2206.pdf>)

⁷ C. Vianini, C. Berger, *Warfare and Geopolitics in Europe's Southern Neighborhood: Implications for NATO*, IAI Commentaries (2021) (link <https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iai2113.pdf>)

⁸ A. Berti, *Re-Discovering Italy's Mediterranean Vocation*, IAI Commentaries (2021) (link <https://www.iai.it/it/pubblicazioni/re-discovering-italys-mediterranean-vocation>)

⁹ According to Freedom House, the Mediterranean area is very well subject to regime-change and to the establishment of military regimes, that in most cases constitute a threat to the fundamental human rights;

- International dimension – Italy is an active member state of the UN and other important International Organizations, that have been created with the purpose of upholding democracy, the respect of human rights and the rule of law.

Each of this dimension has a system of reference in which States cooperate in a delicate balance of power between each other.

Therefore, under art. 117 of the Italian Constitution (1948), “legislative powers shall be vested in the State and the Regions in compliance with the Constitution and with the constraints deriving from EU legislation and international obligations. The State has exclusive legislative powers in the following matters: (a) foreign policy and international relations of the State; relations between the State and the European Union; right of asylum and legal status of non-EU citizens [...]”¹⁰. Art. 117 Const., that has been recently reformed in 2001 through constitutional amendments, has been particularly important with regards to the division of competences between the State and the Regions: as stated, some matters are measures of concurring legislation, such as foreign trade, job security, civil ports and airports, healthcare, instruction, while some other matters are exclusive competences of the State (such as defense, immigration, public order), because the Regions enjoy exclusive legislative powers in every issue that has not been explicitly referred to the exclusive competences of the State. Both State and Regions, within their jurisdiction, have to strictly respect values and norms enshrined in the Constitution, conceived as the foundational charter of the Italian Republic: despite the distinction between legislative powers pertaining exclusively to the State, in contrast to the competences assigned solely to the Regions, unity and indivisibility remain two key-features of the nation. In addition, State and Regions legislate respectively in the fields of their competences, but without compromising international commitments and the State’s obligations under international law, as well as the constraints stemming from the membership to the European Union: international commitments are the only boundaries to the legislative action of the State.

another supportive argument comes from ISPI’s publication available at <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/security-sectors-mena-economics-governance-crisis-35920>

¹⁰ Website www.senato.it

In fact, as laid down in Art. 117 Const., the State has exclusive legislative powers in regulating the foreign policy and international relations of the State within the international arena, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, that is the one entitled to project Italian politics in the world and to protect its interests abroad. More specifically, the Ministry is given the task of ensuring that international and European duties accomplished by the other ministries are not inconsistent with the country's international commitments. Before the detailed analysis of the functions of the Ministry, its structure and the role of Italian foreign policy, it's important to briefly mention the context in which international relations are taking place nowadays, in order to depict a clear picture of the operational apparatus in which the Crisis Unit works.

This year has been particularly tough for the delicate balance of the international community. The war in Ukraine has brought back the primitive principle of resort to violence and military aggression as instruments to regulate disputes among States, a practice that has never been used since the Second World War and since the establishment of cooperation as a tool for avoiding states to wage war, in the name of the common interests that link many States to each other. The operating system of the institutions through which global governance is exercised has never been so close to the brink: if States cooperate with each other, for the sake of the common good, they will not be pushed to start a war. The atrocities committed in the last century, especially after the two world wars, suggested that international cooperation was a primary necessity, in order to overcome disagreements between States and impose peace and stability in the global governance. After the brutalities carried out by national egoisms, cooperation in all possible issue areas seemed to be the solution for the maintenance of international security: as a result, many International Organizations (IOs) grew up, in many fields of competence, in order to increase the mutual advantage ("cooperate with each other across borders for the greater good of mankind"¹¹) and to decrease the chances for States to resolve disputes through violence. Consequently, for instance, IOs were established in

¹¹ Klabbers J., *Advanced Introduction to the Law of International Organizations*, Edward Elgar Publishing (2015)

the fields of monetary regulation, human rights protection, trade, food and agriculture, healthcare, etc. With this regard, it's important the definition of IO as an entity under international law usually created between states, set up on the basis of a treaty, that possesses at least one organ (typically, a plenary organ where all member states of the IO are represented, or an executive body, or a secretariat), and have a will that is distinct from that of the single member states. This last requirement is particularly relevant, since it means that the IO needs to have the capacity to generate an autonomous will, that stems from provisions of the constitutional agreement, that is free from the constraints of the individual will of member states, because it must guarantee the common good, in the delicate balance between rights and obligations.

Definitely, the degree of international cooperation may be very different from one part of the world to another. For instance, in Asia, due to cultural features, there has always been a limited form of relations among States; however, cooperation for the maintenance of international security has always characterized international relations since the wake of the Second World War.

Mankind has always looked for a global order, since the ages of the Westphalia Peace at the end of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), where the modern international system was born; as Henry Kissinger explains: “a cooperative order in unstoppable expansion, where nation-States comply with rules and common norms, that embrace liberal economic systems, that renounce to territorial gains, that respect national sovereignty, and that adopt participatory and democratic systems of government”¹².

Nowadays, although IOs are unanimously recognized as crucial subjects of international law having international legal personality, the resort to violence and military aggression has roughly subverted international community, whose landscape is dramatically changing.

For this reason, international relations among the different States of the world are becoming more and more prominent. With a traditional war fought on European territory, cleavages and controversies among States may lead to an irreversible situation of chaos within the international arena, where the major powers could not handle anymore the

¹² Kissinger H., *Global Order*, Penguin Books (2014)

delicate equilibrium that so far has been vital in the preservation of peace and international security.

Due to these factors, according to the Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Amb. Ettore F. Sequi ¹³, the Ministry is identified as a “society of services provider”, not only for the country and for Italian citizens, but also for the protection of Euro-Atlantic values and global stability.

Global governance is exercised through diplomacy, the lifeblood of foreign policy, the essential instrument that lies at the core of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. Diplomacy is a valuable tool for Italian government to safeguard its interests all around the world, by virtue of the capacity of the Ministry to look for systematic model of coordination among the different institutions of the State, as it is open to establish new partnership with different stakeholders, both from the international community and from civil society, as well as from academy or private companies. Italian diplomacy, that in most cases is silent due to the confidential nature of many of its activities, work for the benefit of everyone, in the name of the common good, with a view on the international order as a system based on democratic principles and human rights protection ¹⁴.

In other words, through diplomacy, representatives of the States can preserve national interests abroad: the art of negotiation allows diplomats to seek national objects, following the direction given by the Minister. Negotiation requires specific professional requirements that every diplomat should possess: flexibility, synthesis, diversity management; additionally, two fundamental know-how that a diplomat acquire are institutional relations and negotiating technique, two main professional features to become a diplomat ¹⁵.

There are different kinds of diplomacy. The first important distinction is between bilateral and multilateral diplomacy: whenever the actors involved are only two, for instance two countries that negotiate for the exchange of energy resources, we speak in terms of

¹³ Statistical Yearbook, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (2022)

¹⁴ S. Baldi, G. Nesi (a cura di), *Diplomatici. 33 saggi su aspetti giuridici e politici della diplomazia contemporanea*, Università degli Studi di Trento (2018)

¹⁵ Ibidem

bilateral diplomacy. In this case, bilateral diplomacy usually takes place in the embassies or consulates, for offices abroad, or even at the Ministry in cases of meeting at home between Italian diplomats and foreign delegations. On the contrary, when the actors involved in the negotiation are more than two, it is the case of multilateral diplomacy: this may occur usually within the organs of an IO. The most prototypical example of multilateral diplomacy is the UNGA, the General Assembly of the United Nations: it represents the plenary organ of the UN, where every member state has the possibility to vehiculate its position on the matter in question on the political agenda, where basically each State is equal to the others, although the UNGA cannot impose binding decisions on the members states, due to the fact that the UN Security Council is the only entity that can adopt binding decision, despite the veto power of the five permanent members (USA, Russia, France, Great Britain, China).

Another key-aspect among the different types of diplomacy regards the field of competence: negotiation may interests not only energy matters, but also military issues, monetary regulation, trade, etc. For instance, economic diplomacy is particularly important, specifically when taking into account foreign investments, economic agenda, major trade agreements. With respect to this, we can distinguish between public and private economic diplomacy, which in turn may be bilateral or multilateral: cases of public economic diplomacy have been the new Belt and Road Initiative, a program of mass investments around the world developed by China, but also the customs union agreement between EU and Turkey. Instead, cases of private economic diplomacy may regard energy networks (the Russian Gazprom), or Unicredit investment mission. The dualism between public and private sectors has been quite problematic, since many countries haven't accepted the undoubted growing importance of the private sector in international relations. For example, in the US there's a tradition of putting together public and private interests, while the EU still doesn't fully recognize the relevance of private sector. In Italy, there is a growing need to optimize synergies between public and private sectors, in order to coordinate efforts and make use of the advantages coming

from private companies; in this, the Bassanini-Frattini Law (2002) was very significant, since it introduced managers' mobility between public and private sectors ¹⁶.

In the last decades, with regards to the fields of competence in diplomacy, we have to say that security matters have experienced a downward trend, in favor of economic issues that instead have grown further and quicker ¹⁷. Nevertheless, it seems that this trend may switch.

With regards to the security matters, among its various competences in the field of foreign policy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation has also the task of preventing and facing threats to national security. Particularly, this matter falls within the jurisdiction of the DG for Political Affairs and Security (that will be analyzed in the following paragraph). In fact, the Ministry has to guarantee five main aspects in the field of security ¹⁸:

1. It has to ensure the proper institutional representation of the Italian Republic abroad;
2. It has to coordinate, enforce and promote the Italian interests in the international arena;
3. It has to put every effort in the maintenance of the peace and in the preservation of international security, through a constant and active involvement in United Nations and other International or Regional organizations wherein Italy is a member;
4. It has to give support to citizens abroad, perhaps in emergency situation where a citizen has allegedly been violated one of his fundamental right;
5. It has to promote European integration and to be an active member of the European community.

¹⁶ MAECI, *Libro Bianco (L'attività del MAECI in Parlamento – XVIII legislatura, 2018-2022)*, Gabinetto del Ministro – Ufficio Rapporti con il Parlamento (September 2022)

¹⁷ *Ibidem*

¹⁸ S. Baldi, *Ministero degli Affari Esteri Guida alla Farnesina*, DGRI Istituto Diplomatico, ISDI Press (2012)

In pursuing its duties, the Ministry ensures effective coordination and consistency between national activities and the objects of European and International matters ¹⁹.

With respect to diplomatic corps, it is generally acknowledged the useful functions pertaining to diplomatic representatives: for this reason, diplomatic missions enjoy privileges and immunities. In fact, if diplomats have to exercise their functions effectively, they need to be granted a special status within the hosting state's jurisdiction, they should be allowed to work without any interference: national laws are still valid, but diplomatic staff and premises are protected by a sort of legal shield, as the national regulation could not be enforced against them ²⁰. Typically, diplomatic immunity addresses four distinct groups of subjects: the diplomatic delegation as a whole, the permanent staff working at the embassy, its premises, and the representatives of the State ²¹. Diplomatic immunity usually results in exemption from regular taxation, immunity from administrative and civil jurisdiction, from visa requirements, or from military service in the hosting state. This principle has been laid down by the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961, an international agreement that sets out the main rules in the conduct of foreign relations through the codification of norms of customary law. The Vienna Convention is key in our analysis since it introduced the concept of diplomatic immunity: under Art. 29²² and Art. 31²³, the Convention declares the

¹⁹ Ibidem

²⁰ S. Baldi, G. Nesi (a cura di), *Diplomatici. 33 saggi su aspetti giuridici e politici della diplomazia contemporanea*, Università degli Studi di Trento (2018)

²¹ Ibidem

²² Art. 29, Vienna Convention of Diplomatic Relations (1961): "The person of a diplomatic agent shall be inviolable. He shall not be liable to any form of arrest or detention. The receiving State shall treat him with due respect and shall take all appropriate steps to prevent any attack on his person, freedom or dignity."

²³ Art. 31, Vienna Convention of Diplomatic Relations (1961): "1. A diplomatic agent shall enjoy immunity from the criminal jurisdiction of the receiving State. He shall also enjoy immunity from its civil and administrative jurisdiction, except in the case of:

(a) A real action relating to private immovable property situated in the territory of the receiving State, unless he holds it on behalf of the sending State for the purposes of the mission;

(b) An action relating to succession in which the diplomatic agent is involved as executor, administrator, heir or legatee as a private person and not on behalf of the sending State;

inviolability of diplomatic corps, that cannot be subject to any form of detention or imprisonment, as the diplomat enjoys immunity from penal, civil and administrative jurisdiction.

Diplomatic immunity raises concerns of responsibility issues, especially when taking into account the alleged infringement of human rights: if they are immune from jurisdiction, they are not to be held accountable. The only sanction allowed towards diplomatic representatives, is the expulsion from the hosting state.

(c) An action relating to any professional or commercial activity exercised by the diplomatic agent in the receiving State outside his official functions.

2. A diplomatic agent is not obliged to give evidence as a witness.

3. No measures of execution may be taken in respect of a diplomatic agent except in the cases coming under subparagraphs (a), (b) and (c) of paragraph 1 of this article, and provided that the measures concerned can be taken without infringing the inviolability of his person or of his residence.

4. The immunity of a diplomatic agent from the jurisdiction of the receiving State does not exempt him from the jurisdiction of the sending State.”

1.2 Diplomatic Network

The objectives of the Italian Ministry are pursued around a solid diplomatic network, which is made up of effective institutions that fairly represent the country abroad: embassies, consulates, permanent representations to the international organizations (or permanent missions as in the case of the UN), cultural institutes.

Basically, these institutions constitute the further expression of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, its manifestation abroad, whose purposes are to represent the country and to protect Italian interests around the world. The diplomatic network operates in the field of international relations with other countries, on behalf and upon indication of the Ministry: embassies and consulates are the designated institutions that relate with foreign delegations, enforce intercultural dialogue and make negotiations for strengthening Italian involvement in the international context. Moreover, as further manifestations of the Italian Ministry abroad, the entities of the diplomatic network are officially recognized by the authorities of the hosting states, that as such have to communicate with them.

As a matter of fact, the differences among the institutions that constitute the diplomatic network are several ²⁴.

1.2.1 Embassies

Embassies are the official diplomatic representations of the Italian government which offers a variety of services granted to Italian citizens and foreigners willing to acquire contacts with Italy. Embassies are always located in the capital cities of the foreign state and their primary task is to engage in diplomatic relations with the hosting nation. The head of the embassy is the Ambassador, who is in charge of the entire diplomatic mission: she/he is the one representing the country abroad, the one responsible for every issue that may occur; for this reason, it may happen that the embassy is also the residence where the Ambassador lives. Embassies' activity encompasses the management of political, economic and cultural relations between the countries in question, through the

²⁴ Official website of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation www.esteri.it

assumption that cooperation involves the consolidation of bonds of various nature. Art. 3 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961 enlists the specific functions of a diplomatic mission:

“1. The functions of a diplomatic mission consist, inter alia, in:

- (a) Representing the sending State in the receiving State;
- (b) Protecting in the receiving State the interests of the sending State and of its nationals, within the limits permitted by international law;
- (c) Negotiating with the Government of the receiving State;
- (d) Ascertaining by all lawful means conditions and developments in the receiving State, and reporting thereon to the Government of the sending State;
- (e) Promoting friendly relations between the sending State and the receiving State, and developing their economic, cultural and scientific relations. “²⁵

In addition, diplomatic representatives are afforded special privileges and legal immunity from national laws. The same is valid for premises, archives and everything that concern the embassy, which enjoys extraterritorial status as ordinary sovereign territory of the represented State. Immunity granted to the diplomatic representatives accredited to the authorities of the foreign country represents a kind of practical exception to the host state’s jurisdiction: its national laws are still applied and valid even for the embassy, but at the same time the embassy is protected by a sort of legal shield, as national laws of the hosting state cannot be enforced against the diplomatic mission. In fact, under art. 22 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961, “1. The premises of the mission shall be inviolable. The agents of the receiving State may not enter them, except with the consent of the head of the mission.

2. The receiving State is under a special duty to take all appropriate steps to protect the premises of the mission against any intrusion or damage and to prevent any disturbance of the peace of the mission or impairment of its dignity.

3. The premises of the mission, their furnishings and other property thereon and the means of transport of the mission shall be immune from search, requisition, attachment or execution. “²⁶.

²⁵ Art. 3, Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961)

²⁶ Art. 22, Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961)

Also art. 24 of the Vienna Convention is relevant for our analysis, since it clearly states the inviolability of archives and documents pertaining to the embassy, and their exemption from national, regional or municipal norms: “The archives and documents of the mission shall be inviolable at any time and wherever they may be.”²⁷. As laid down in the Vienna Convention, premises of an embassy enjoy legal immunity from national rules of the hosting state and extraterritorial status from the sending state as sovereign territory.

Furthermore, with regard to the high number of embassies around the world, the Lowy Institute, an independent think tank providing high-quality research in international politics, has developed the Global Diplomacy Index²⁸, which takes into consideration the diplomatic networks of 65 countries, most of which are in the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, established in 1961 in Paris) and the G20 (the last two countries added to the Index have been Colombia and Costa Rica, that have joined OECD in 2021), making possible the comparison not only between different countries but also temporarily in four different years (2016, 2017, 2019, 2021). The Index offers a comprehensive understanding of the global major diplomatic networks. The Lowy Institute has ranked each country with respect to its diplomatic network (number of embassies around the world, n° of consulates, n° of representatives per country, etc), underlining limits and advantages in global coverage and geopolitical reach for every diplomatic network of the different countries under analysis. The methodology adopted in order to develop the Index stems from a combination of data, resources and information: most of them, as primary sources, have included desk research on foreign affairs ministries’ websites of the 65 countries. According to the Global Diplomacy Index, the top of the ranking is occupied by China at first with 275 total posts of its diplomatic delegations and 171 Chinese embassies around the world, followed by the US with 267 total posts and 167 American embassies in the world, while at the third place France with 264 total posts and 161 embassies. Italy is placed at the 11th position, after Brazil and before India, with 208 total posts of its diplomatic delegations, as it can be viewed from

²⁷ Art. 24, Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961)

²⁸ <https://globaldiplomacyindex.lowyinstitute.org>

the two images below, where it is displayed the Global Diplomacy Index of Italy and the ranking in comparison with other countries.

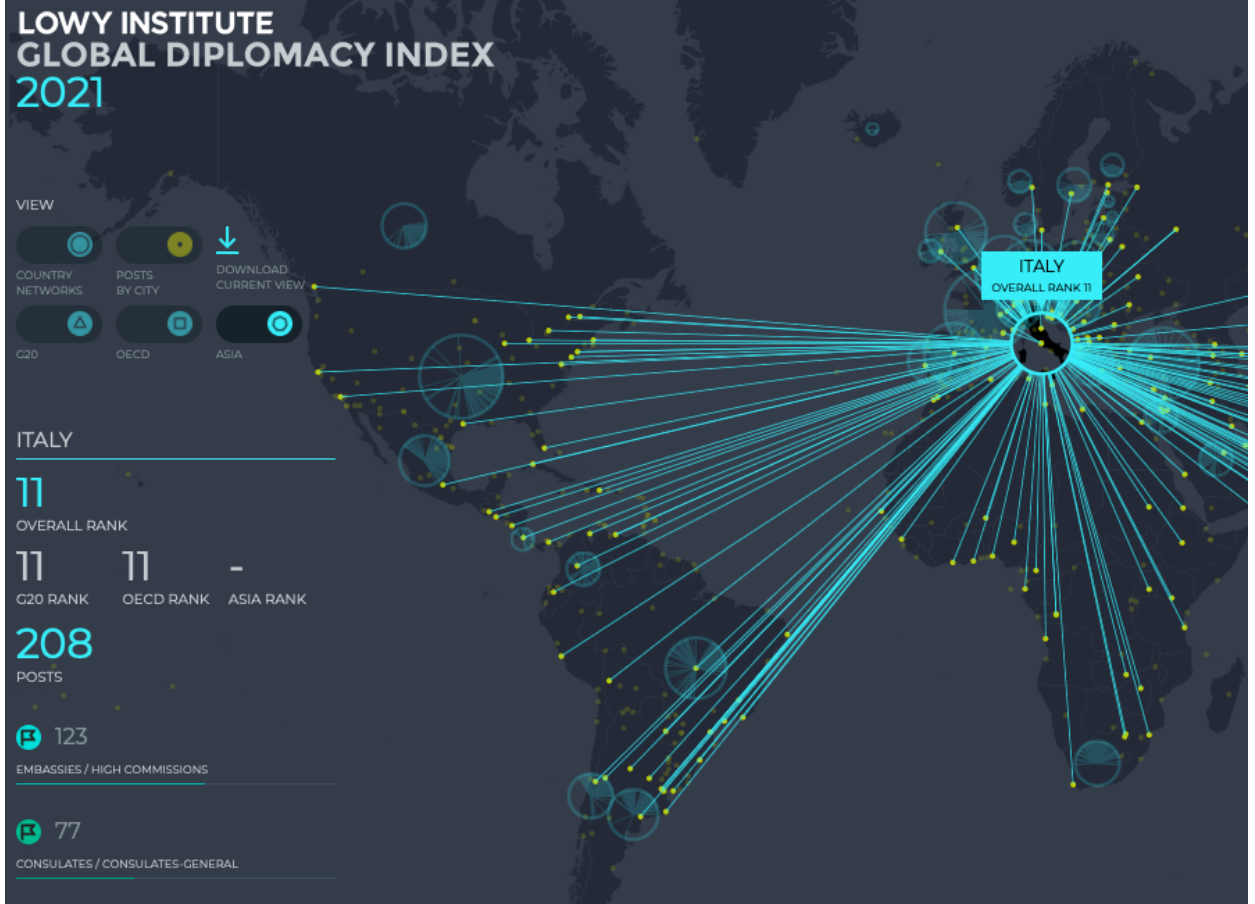


Figure 1: Global Diplomacy Index for Italy (<https://globaldiplomacyindex.lowyinstitute.org> 2021)

COUNTRY	POPULATION (M)	GDP (B, USD)	TOTAL POSTS	POST TYPE				RANK				
				EMBASSIES / HIGH COMMISSIONS	CONSULATES / CONSULATES-GENERAL	PERMANENT MISSIONS	OTHER REPRESENTATIONS	G20 RANK	OECD RANK	ASIA RANK	EMBASSIES RANK	OVERALL RANK
UNITED KINGDOM	67	3108	222	156	49	11	6	7	7	4	7	
GERMANY	83	4230	220	147	60	11	2	8	8	6	8	
SPAIN	47	1440	217	116	90	10	1	9	9	13	9	
BRAZIL	213	1646	211	132	66	11	2	10	10	9	10	
ITALY	60	2120	208	123	77	8	0	11	11	12	11	
INDIA	1380	2946	184	125	50	5	4	12	12	3	12	

Figure 2: Ranking Global Diplomacy Index (<https://globaldiplomacyindex.lowyinstitute.org> 2021)

1.2.2 Consulates

Among the other institutions that make up Italian diplomatic network, consulates are further representations of the Italian government, its projection of foreign policy at international level. Consular offices are subordinated to embassies: while the last are placed in the capital city of the hosting state, consular offices are not necessarily in the capital city, since their main tasks consists in any problems that involve Italian citizens abroad, for instance in matters of job regulations, visa, healthcare, documents, etc... These institutions are less political than embassies, due to the fact that they have administrative duties: under the coordination of embassies, consulates assist the national community and enforce political, economic, cultural relations with the territories of competence. In addition, the Italian State recognizes different kinds of consulates, each one of different hierarchy, as: the General Consulate, the most important one, whose tasks concern the fields of both national and international law, the Consulate, that comprehends different levels, the Vice Consulate, the Consulate Agency, and the Honorary Consulate²⁹, whose jurisdiction is in most cases merely symbolical, since it assumes bureaucratic functions. The number of consulates around the world is less than the number of embassies, due to the major political competences assigned to embassies: Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs can rely on a peculiar system of 129 embassies around the world and 83 consular offices in 2021, according to the 2022 Statistical Yearbook drafted by the Foreign Affairs Ministry itself³⁰.

With respect to consulates, it's important to focus the attention on the contribution made by the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations³¹, an international treaty outlining the structural architecture of consular relations between countries. The treaty has been signed on 24th April 1963 in Vienna after the UN Conference on Consular Relations, it was ratified by 182 States and it came into force in 1967. The Vienna Convention is actually a codification of customary norms, that previously were respected as the general State practice (*usus*) accepted as law (*opinion juris*). It defines a set of rules concerning rights and duties of consular offices and their staff, through also the introduction of the

²⁹ https://www.esteri.it/mae/ministero/pubblicazioni/allegati/20120222_il_console_onorario_in_italia.pdf

³⁰ Statistical Yearbook, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (2022)

³¹ https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=III-6&chapter=3&clang=en

distinction between the sending state (the country the consul is representing) and the receiving state (the hosting country); within this institutional framework, the Convention grants immunities and privileges to the consular offices and to the diplomats representing the sending state, affording a principle that lies at the core of foreign policy and that, for this reason, will be discussed in the next paragraph.

1.2.3 Permanent Representations

Permanent Representations to International Organizations (IOs) are diplomatic missions of a member state (in this case, Italy) within the various institutions and organisms of an IO. Their role is to strengthen relationships with the member states of the IO, to participate in the activity of the organization, as to vote in the cases of a plenary organ, and to uphold the interests of the state within the international arena³². Italy has always been an active element of the international community, making cooperation the milestone of its foreign policy; as a consequence, Italy is part of many international organizations, such as the United Nations (a global organization), NATO (a military alliance), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (that addresses key global policy issues, established in 1961), and also more regional organizations such as the European Union (Italy was one of the founding members) or the Council of Europe (settled in Strasbourg in 1949). According to the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961³³, a permanent representation is the diplomatic organ that a state, that is a member of an international organization, institutes at the headquarter of the IO, with the aim to keep lasting and fruitful relationships with the member states of the IO. In the UN framework, the diplomatic delegation representing a member state is called “permanent missions”, while in the EU they are called “permanent representatives”.

1.2.4 Italian Cultural Institutes

Italian Cultural Institutes are further manifestations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs abroad; the substantive difference with the other organisms of the diplomatic network

³² www.esteri.it

³³ https://legal.un.org/ilc/texts/instruments/english/conventions/9_1_1961.pdf

mentioned above, lies in the cultural feature of its competences: indeed, the institutes' object is to foster cultural relations with the hosting nation. Their duties have been disciplined through Law 22 Dec 1990, nr. 40³⁴, regulating the activities of the institutes, such as the organization of cultural events with the aim of promoting Italian culture in the world; the events concern mainly art, music, literature, cinema, theater, as well as language courses or classes of Italian culture. More precisely, the institutes are defined as “places of gathering and dialogue for intellectuals and artists, for Italians abroad, and for everyone willing to cultivate a relationship with our country”³⁵. In other words, their goal is to strengthen the intercultural dialogue grounded on the democratic principle, between different countries of the world. Italian cultural institutes may cooperate with institutions, associations, universities of the hosting nation, with the intention of promoting the involvement of Italian artists and developing cultural relations with other states; they are 84 around the world³⁶, as it can be seen in the image below.

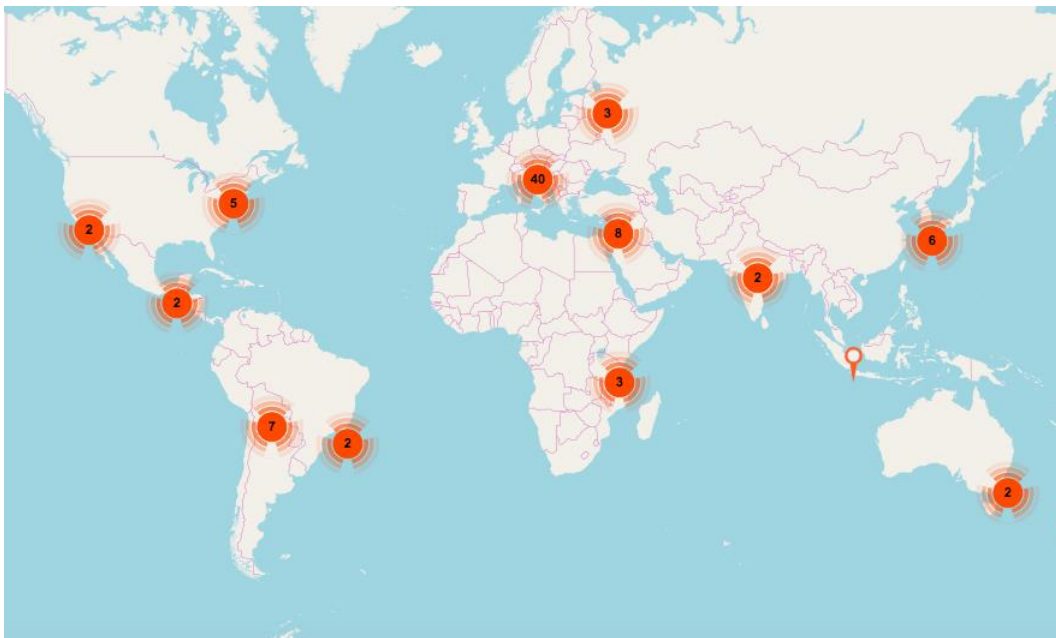


Figure 3: Italian Cultural Institutes (www.esteri.it 2023)

³⁴ <https://www.esteri.it/MAE/normative/leg22.12.90.pdf>

³⁵ <https://www.esteri.it/it/diplomazia-culturale-e-diplomazia-scientifica/cultura/reteiic/>

³⁶ <https://www.esteri.it/it/diplomazia-culturale-e-diplomazia-scientifica/cultura/reteiic/>

The degree of cooperation between the country and the hosting state may vary, depending not only on the nature or the features of the countries in question, but also on the kind of relationship established: it is important whether the countries are more similar in terms of political perspective, or whether the two countries both enjoy membership in the same International or Regional Organizations, meaning that they may share a common view on how to shape international relations. On the other hand, if the cleavage between the country and the hosting state is significant, consequently producing a scarce degree of cooperation, this may result in the expulsion of the Ambassador from the hosting state, that however is considered to be a measure of last resort ³⁷.

1.2.5 Statistical Analysis

The Crisis Unit of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs communicate with every organisms of the diplomatic network: whenever some key-information are needed, there is a constant and efficient dialogue among institutions. Embassies and consulates actively interact with the Crisis Unit especially in times of emergency. For example, when an Italian citizen is imprisoned, the responsiveness of crisis management depends on the dialogue between the Crisis Unit and the Italian embassy of the country where the citizen has been imprisoned ³⁸.

The diplomatic network, with the functions that Italian representatives and its staff embed, constitutes the focal point that lies at the core of the work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, that shapes the foreign policy through and by virtue of the diplomatic network.

According to the 2022 Statistical Yearbook of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation³⁹, the diplomatic network can rely on 305 offices abroad: the charter below clearly highlights the distribution of the Italian offices abroad, according

³⁷ Klabbers J., *Advanced Introduction to the Law of International Organizations*, Edward Elgar Publishing (2015)

³⁸ Information acquired during the conversation between the author and the permanent staff of the Crisis Unit (that took place the 5th January 2023)

³⁹ Statistical Yearbook, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (2022)

both to geography and category of diplomatic missions (embassies, consulates, permanent representations and cultural institutes).

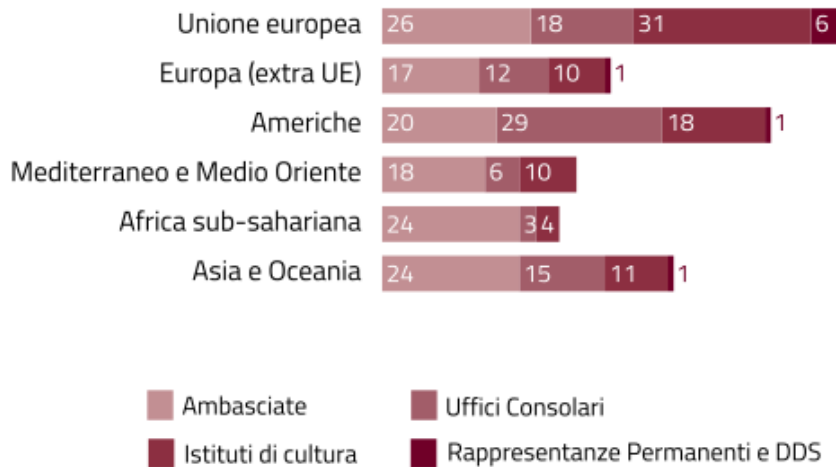


Figure 4: N° diplomatic missions, distribution by geography (Statistical Yearbook MAECI 2022)

Through the application of the geographical criteria, the majority of the offices are in the European Union: specifically, 27%, while 22% are in the American continent, 17% in Asia, 11% in the MENA region, 13% in the extra EU countries, and the remaining 10% in sub-Saharan Africa.

The differences among the institutions that make up the diplomatic network (embassies, consulates, permanent representations and cultural institutes), previously analyzed, are also evident in the numbers: in fact, there is a huge gap between the number of embassies and the other organisms. In 2021, Italian embassies around the world were in total 129, as the last one to be established has been the Embassy in Bamako (Mali) in 2020. By contrast, the number of consulates and the number of cultural institutes in the world are considerably less, with the last being 84 whereas the consular offices being 83. The chart below indicates the distribution by category of Italian offices abroad (embassies, permanent representations, consulates, cultural institutes), with a time frame of the last three years.

Tipologia	2019	2020 ⁽¹⁾	2021 ⁽²⁾
Ambasciate	128	129	129
Rappresentanze Permanenti presso Organismi internazionali	8	8	8
Delegazioni Diplomatiche speciali	1	1	1
Uffici consolari:	80	81	83
<i>Consolati Generali I classe</i>	9	9	9
<i>Consolati Generali</i>	52	52	53
<i>Consolati I classe</i>	2	2	2
<i>Consolati</i>	14	15	15
<i>Agenzie Consolari</i>	3	3	4
Istituti Italiani di Cultura	84	84	84
Totale	301	303	305

Fonte: DGRI - DGSP

⁽¹⁾ nel 2020 sono stati istituiti l'Ambasciata a Bamako (Mali) e il Consolato a Manchester (Regno Unito)

⁽²⁾ nel 2021 sono stati istituiti il Consolato Generale a Bangalore (India) e l'Agenzia Consolare ad Arona (Isole Canarie - Spagna)

Figure 5: N° diplomatic missions, distribution by category (Statistical Yearbook MAECI 2022)

Italian offices abroad are run by diplomat and employees, that with their steady tasks ensure that the diplomatic work is carried out efficiently even abroad by institutional representatives.

In 2021, the permanent staff working abroad for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been of 3583 individuals, as pointed out by the chart below, that shows the historical series since 2010 of the personnel employed in the foreign offices by the Ministry ⁴⁰.

⁴⁰ Statistical Yearbook, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (2022)

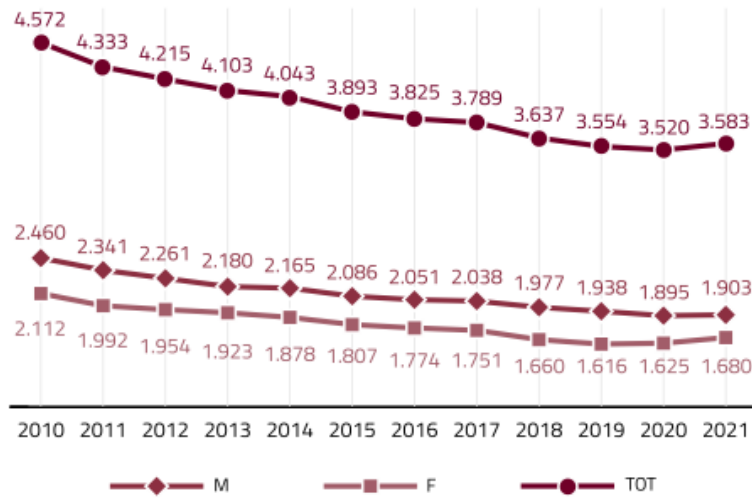


Figure 6: Foreign offices, permanent staff (Statistical Yearbook MAECI 2022)

The 2022 Statistical Yearbook stresses the fact that the percentage of female diplomats, that in 2020 was 23%, has increased of 1% in 2021, while the percentage of female directors in 2021 is 32%. The chart below shows the distribution by gender of every kind of personnel working for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, both at home and abroad⁴¹.

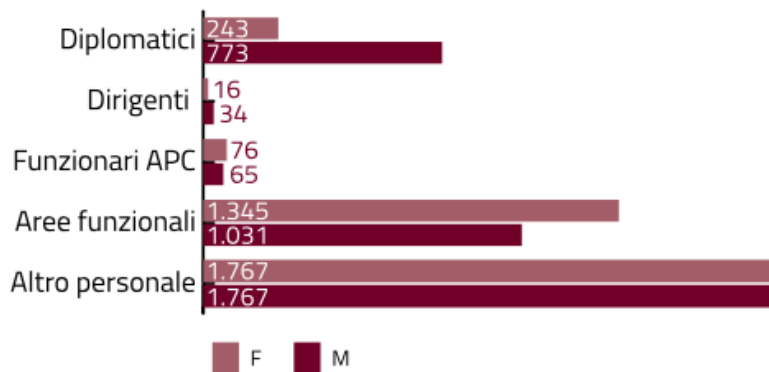


Figure 7: Permanent staff, distribution by gender (Statistical Yearbook MAECI 2022)

Another key-feature underlined by the Statistical Yearbook, with regards to the distribution by gender of Italian diplomats, is that in 2021 female diplomats were totally 243 (equal to 24% of the total Italian diplomats): only 5 of them were ranked as “Ambasciatrici”, the highest degree that a diplomat may achieve, while 25 were “Ministre Plenipotenziarie”, 61 were “Consigliere di Ambasciata”, 47 were “Consigliere di

⁴¹ Ibidem

Legazione”, and 105 were “Segretaria di Legazione”⁴². The chart below shows the distribution by gender of every hierarchical degree of Italian diplomats, at home and abroad, working for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation⁴³.

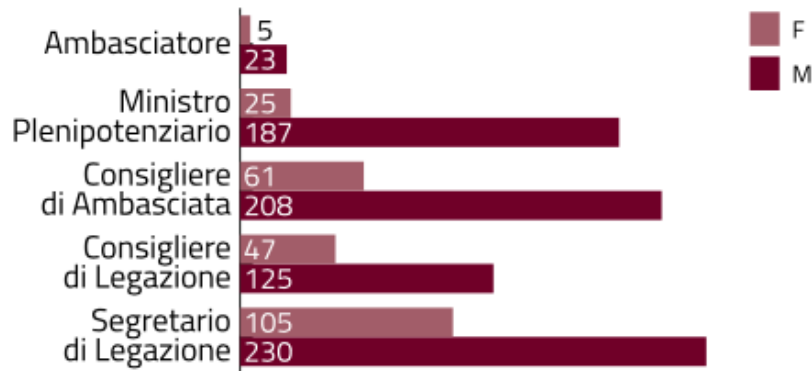


Figure 8: N° diplomats, distribution by gender (Statistical Yearbook MAECI 2022)

Moreover, it’s particularly relevant the balance between males and females working as diplomats, abroad and at home, as well as the proportion of females working as permanent staff, whose imbalance with the male gender is less disproportioned.

In order to understand the gender distribution and the percentage of females working both as diplomat and as permanent staff of the Ministry, abroad and at home, the chart below shows the historical series by kind of personnel, for a total of 3583 individuals, where 1903 are males and 1680 are females: approximately, 47% of the permanent staff are females, while 53% are males⁴⁴.

⁴² Statistical Yearbook, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (2022)

⁴³ Ibidem

⁴⁴ Ibidem

Anni	Diplomatici	quota % donne	Dirigenti amm.vi	quota % donne	Dirigenti APC	quota % donne	Aree funzionali	quota % donne	Funzionari APC	quota % donne	Totale			quota % donne
											f	m	tot	
2010	909	18%	35	43%	6	50%	3.457	53%	165	51%	2.112	2.460	4.572	46%
2011	919	18%	31	42%	6	50%	3.231	54%	146	53%	1.992	2.341	4.333	46%
2012	923	19%	37	35%	11	36%	3.104	54%	140	53%	1.954	2.261	4.215	46%
2013	910	21%	42	33%	9	33%	3.008	55%	134	51%	1.923	2.180	4.103	47%
2014	932	21%	44	32%	8	38%	2.935	55%	124	52%	1.878	2.165	4.043	46%
2015	917	21%	42	33%	7	29%	2.812	55%	115	51%	1.807	2.086	3.893	46%
2016	958	22%	42	33%	5	20%	2.711	55%	109	52%	1.774	2.051	3.825	46%
2017	977	22%	38	34%	7	43%	2.666	55%	101	50%	1.751	2.038	3.789	46%
2018	996	23%	37	35%	7	29%	2.504	55%	93	48%	1.660	1.977	3.637	46%
2019	1.018	23%	38	34%	7	29%	2.394	55%	97	48%	1.616	1.938	3.554	45%
2020	1.000	23%	46	33%	7	29%	2.332	56%	135	53%	1.625	1.895	3.520	46%
2021	1.016	24%	44	32%	6	33%	2.376	57%	141	54%	1.680	1.903	3.583	47%

Fonte: elaborazione su dati DGRI

Figure 9: Permanent staff, historical series (Statistical Yearbook MAECI 2022)

The diplomatic network is built upon the interinstitutional dialogue between the different organisms that work as representatives of the Ministry. The headquarter based in Rome is the central organ of a peculiar system that everyday exchange information, data, news, in order to put together the efforts of every Italian institution around the world and optimize synergy between the central Ministry and the embassies. As a matter of fact, there is a constant dialogue among the organs of the diplomatic network, with the consequence of coordinating and focusing the main financial and human resources on the political priorities highlighted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Furthermore, the DGs (Directorates-General), namely the departments that constitute the Ministry based in Rome, each of them with a different jurisdiction, articulate the exchange of information, depending on the field of competence, and enforce the institutional dialogue between the embassies and the central Ministry. With this respect, also the Crisis Unit is part of this system: as it will be analysed more in details, during an emergency, such as the imprisonment of an Italian citizen abroad, or the alleged infringement of one of his/her human rights, the imminent communication between the Crisis Unit and the Italian embassy of the country in question is fundamental in order to manage the crisis. For instance, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Crisis Unit was deeply involved, almost

overwhelmed, in assisting Italian citizens abroad, that due to the closure of the borders around the world were not able to go back to their home country. Embassies all over the world had to put together immense efforts along with the Crisis Unit that was in charge of coordinating the whole operation. In many occasions, as underlined by the former Head of the Crisis Unit Amb. Stefano Verrecchia ⁴⁵, while the embassy in question had to contact Italian citizens that were not able to get back, the DG for Country Promotion managed to organize several flights operated by the so-called *flag carriers*, national airlines such as Ita, with the assistance of the Crisis Unit that achieved to obtain authorization from the local authorities, that otherwise wouldn't have never conceded it. Consequently, even in times of emergency but not necessarily, the coordination and the dialogue among the different organs of the diplomatic network on the one hand (especially embassies and consulates), and on the other hand the central Ministry based in Rome and its DGs, is a key-aspect of Italian foreign policy.

The embassies, that are the most important institutions of the diplomatic network, an essential link of this peculiar system of dialogue and continuous exchange, are representatives of the Italian government abroad. They are a total of 129 in 2021, they constitute the cornerstone of the diplomatic network, the point of reference within the diplomatic apparatus that coordinate the various organisms subordinated to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ⁴⁶. The image below shows the distribution by geography of Italian embassies around the world in the last two years.

⁴⁵ Hearing of the Head of the Crisis Unit Amb. Stefano Verrecchia at the Commission for Foreign and Community Affairs of the Italian Deputies Chamber on 10th June 2020 (source https://www.esteri.it/it/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/eventi/2020/06/camera-audizione-del-capo-dell-unita-di-crisi-verrecchia/)

⁴⁶ Statistical Yearbook, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (2022)

Area geografica	2020	2021
Unione europea	26	26
Europa (extra UE)	17	17
Americhe	20	20
Mediterraneo e Medio Oriente	18	18
Africa sub-sahariana	24	24
Asia e Oceania	24	24
Totale	129	129

Fonte: DGRI

Figure 10: N° embassies, distribution by geography (Statistical Yearbook MAECI 2022)

1.3 Structure

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation has the precise task of enacting the foreign policy of the Italian government and enforcing Italian interests in the context of international relations. More in details, the Minister of Foreign Affairs is the one and the first who is assigned the specific function of representing the State at international level.

The Ministry's duties are clearly defined in Law 23 April 2003, nr. 109, that introduces several changes to the DPR 5 January 1967, nr. 18, regulating the functions of the Ministry:

“ [1.] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is assigned the functions pertaining to the State in matters of political, economic, social and cultural relations with foreign countries; representation, coordination and protection of Italian interests internationally; of analysis, definition and implementation of the Italian action in the field of international politics; relations with other states and with international organizations; stipulation and revision of international treaties and conventions and coordination of related management activities; study and resolution of international law issues, as well as international litigation; representation of the Italian position regarding the implementation of the provisions relating to the common foreign and security policy envisaged by the Treaty of the European Union and relations pertaining to the external political and economic relations of the European Union; development cooperation; of emigration and protection of Italian communities and workers abroad; care of European integration activities in relation to the negotiation requests and processes concerning the treaties of the European Union, the European Community, the ECSC, EURATOM. “⁴⁷

Thereby, Italian foreign policy is shaped and administered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, that is asked also to perform as a whole entity in the protection of national interests abroad. Furthermore, it is in charge of treaties

⁴⁷ Art. 1, Law 23 April 2003, nr. 109

stipulation and coordination of the actions of government in international relations. The European dimension is specifically highlighted, as Italy is one of the constitutive nations of the European community: the Ministry is responsible for taking care of the European integration, an ongoing process that needs to be developed more and more everyday, especially after the growing threats posed to the European order. The European dimension is a milestone of Italian foreign policy, as the next paragraph will analyze more in details. In addition, Law 23 Apr 2003, nr. 109, stresses the importance of security as a matter of competence of the Ministry: security is conceived as common security policy, strictly linked to foreign policy, with a reference to the security of Italian communities and workers abroad ⁴⁸. This last aspect is one of the main competences that the Crisis Unit of the Ministry has: the protection of Italian citizens around the world is one of the reasons that led to the establishment of the Unit, that is able to manage crisis of every kinds with responsiveness, professionalism and humanity.

Before digging into the object of the research, namely the Crisis Unit of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, it's necessary to briefly focus the attention on the organization of the Ministry, in order to understand the architecture in which the Crisis Unit operates.

The two leading figures of the Ministry are the Minister, who represents the highest political authority, and the Secretary General, who instead represents the highest administrative authority; the dualism between these two institutions is at the base of the well-functioning of the Ministry. The Minister is also a member of the Supreme Council of Defence, an organ that was conceived by Art. 87 of the Italian Constitution⁴⁹, and that was later set up after the Korean War (due to the worry that war could spread even to Europe) under Law 28 July 1950, nr. 624: the Supreme Council of Defence is aimed at preserving national security and examining technical political issues of national defence, and it is headed by the President of the Republic; it is composed also by the Prime Minister, the Minister of Defence, the Minister of the Interior, the Minister of Economy

⁴⁸ Art. 1, Law 23 April 2003, nr. 109

⁴⁹ Art. 87, Italian Constitution: "The President of the Republic is the Head of the State and represents national unity. [...] [9.] The President shall be the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, shall preside over the Supreme Council of Defence established by law, and shall make declarations of war as have been agreed by Parliament. " (source website www.senato.it)

and Finance, the Minister of Economic Development and the Chief of the Defence Staff, in addition to the authority of the four armed forces (Army, Navy, Air Force, and Carabinieri), and the President of the Council of State.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is structured into nine Directorates-General (DGs), each of them with different duties and objectives ⁵⁰:

- DG for Political Affairs and Security (DGAP, in Italian translation), that takes into account matters of international security, such as political-strategic issues, or prevention and counter-terrorism activities (Office III is entitled to “global threats to security”);
- DG for Human Resources, Budget and Innovation (DGRI), which is in charge of the budget management, as well as the employment and assignment of human resources, abroad and at home;
- DG for Global Affairs (DGMO), that addresses key global politics matters, issues of global governance or economic policies pertaining to the G7 or G20; this DG was established after the reform of the Foreign Affairs Ministry in 2010, it operates in terms of both multilateral diplomacy (such as in international forums) and bilateral diplomacy, and it is divided into five Central Directions and 13 Offices, according to the geographic area;
- DG for European Union (DGUE), whose competences regard the European integration process in terms of negotiations and treaties on the functioning of the European Union, as also in terms of relations with the other members of the EU;
- DG for Country Promotion (DGSP), whose objective is the promotion of the various components of the national economy (such as Ita, Poste Italiane, Eni, etc...) and to enforce their interests at international level;
- DG for Italian Citizens Abroad and Migration Policies (DGIEPM), that takes into account every issue of migratory policies or problems relating to visa;
- DG for Development Cooperation, which delineate the priorities and the direction with respect to development cooperation, such as activities of humanitarian emergency or cooperation policies in third-world countries;

⁵⁰ <https://www.esteri.it/it/ministero/struttura/>

- DG for Public and Cultural Diplomacy, whose jurisdiction is quite broad, ranging from activities of Communication and Press (every communication that the Ministry of the Minister has to vehiculate), to the organization of various events as a matter of cultural diplomacy, a concept that is developing more and more nowadays, as a key-tool in the functioning of Italian diplomacy around the world;
- DG for Management and Information and Communication Technology (ICT), which instead has to manage and enhance Italian heritage, as well as the evaluation of the budget.

As it is clear, many DGs have similar competences, considering that the administration of day-to-day business with respect to the diplomatic network and Italian foreign policy, is a complex matter, that needs to be shared also with other organisms of the Ministry, in order to get the work effectively done.

In addition to the nine DGs, that are distinguished between themselves in light of their jurisdiction and field of activities, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation is supported also by other departments with specific functions. The General Inspectorate monitors the ordinary functioning of the administration's offices, both the ones located in Italy and abroad, through the adoption of security measures for the personnel of the offices, while the Diplomatic Protocol is the main body charged with regulating the ceremony: the protocol to follow when a foreign delegation visits the Minister, for instance, or the practices that every embassy has to adopt when a new Ambassador is nominated. More in details, Office II of the Diplomatic Protocol provides for the List of foreign diplomatic delegations in Italy⁵¹ (the list of names of the members of the foreign diplomatic personnel in Italy), as well as the List of International Organisms and Special Missions in Italy. Furthermore, the Cabinet coordinate the entire activities of the offices appointed at the direct dependence of the Minister, while the Service for Legal Affairs is an advisory organ that gives opinions on legal affairs and international controversies.

The structure of the Foreign Affairs Ministry is articulated along the main administrative authority, namely the General Secretary: under Art. 6.2 of Law 30 July 1999, nr. 300, the

⁵¹ Diplomatic Protocol, *Foreign Embassies in Italy*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, (2021) (source https://www.esteri.it/mae/resource/doc/2021/03/lda_4_marzo_2021.pdf)

Secretary General directly assists the Minister in the elaboration of the direction and objectives of the entire Ministry⁵²; he/she coordinates offices and the whole action of foreign policy, with the intention of ensuring the continuity and efficacy of its functions. In the absence of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Secretary General substitutes him/her and presides the Council of Administration, which expresses evaluation on the political direction given to the whole action of the Foreign Affairs Ministry. Additionally, the Secretary General is aided by a Vice-Secretary General, that is assigned vicarious functions whenever the Secretary General, for a variety of reasons, is not present⁵³.

In the performance of the duties, the Secretary General is supported by two Units, that are directly subordinated to the General Secretary:

- Crisis Unit, the most important one, that will be comprehensively examined in the following chapter;
- Coordination Unit, which instead is appointed for elaborating data and research on strategic matters of foreign policy, evaluating the implementation of certain policies, and assessing the correct harmonization of the different institutions within the Ministry.

In 2010, the operating system of the Foreign Affairs Ministry has been reformed, according to the DPR 19 May 2010, nr. 95⁵⁴ (“Reorganization of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs”). The structure of the Ministry has changed, for instance with the introduction of the DGMO (Directorate-General for Global Affairs), the definition of clear prerogatives for each DG, and the conferral of specific tasks for the institutions that make up the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: the goal was to keep structurally facing the new global threats of modern days.

In order to pursue effectively its objectives, the Ministry is in need of financial resources: budgetary functions are assigned to the DGRI (DG for Human Resources, Budget and

⁵² www.esteri.it

⁵³ Ibidem

⁵⁴ https://www.esteri.it/mae/normative/normativa_online/principaledisposizionimae/dpr_95_19.05.2010.pdf

Innovation), specifically to Office XI (named “budget and programming of financial resources”). The effective budget for the year 2022 has been equal to 1,093 millions of euro, including the funds for the enactment of Italian foreign policy and international cooperation. This value represents the 0,10% of the total State budget: the three charts below show the distribution by year of both absolute values and percentage that have constituted the budget of the Foreign Affairs Ministry since 2018⁵⁵.

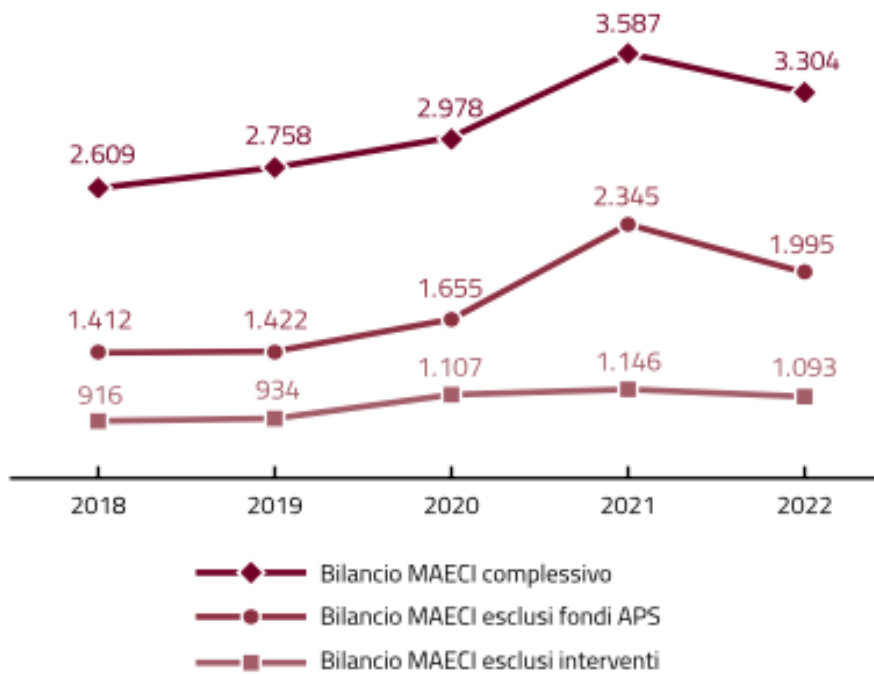


Figure 11: Budget MAECI, absolute values (Statistical Yearbook MAECI 2022)

⁵⁵ Statistical Yearbook, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (2022)

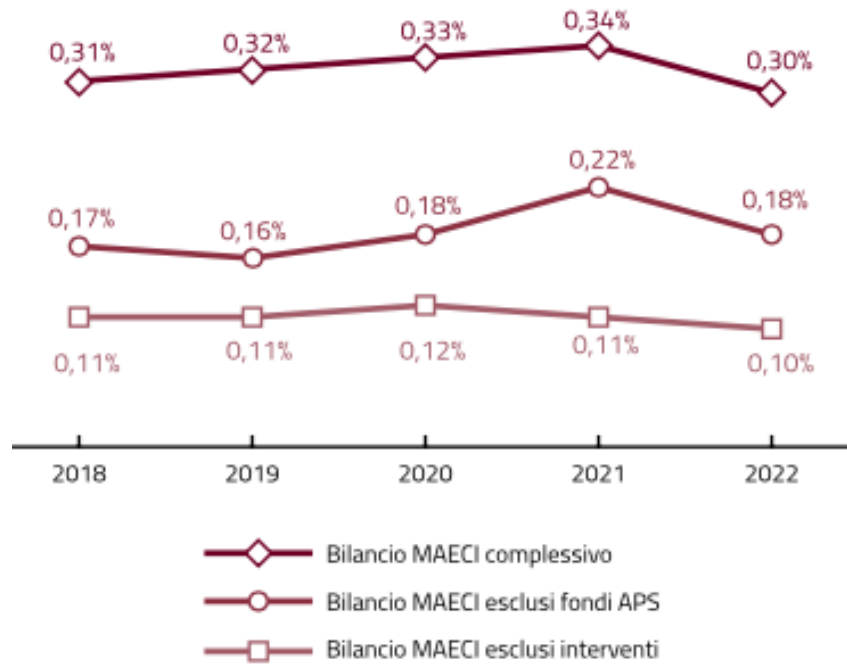


Figure 12: Budget MAECI, percentage (Statistical Yearbook MAECI 2022)

CdR	2021		2022	
	valori assoluti	%	valori assoluti	%
GABI	18,8	0,5%	16,2	0,5%
SEGR	16,1	0,4%	15,4	0,5%
CERI	6,6	0,2%	6,7	0,2%
ISPE	3,2	0,1%	3,7	0,1%
DGRI	629,2	17,5%	646,6	19,6%
DGAI	188,4	5,3%	214,6	6,5%
STAM*	4,0	0,1%	-	-
DGCS	1.098,5	30,6%	1.036,8	31,4%
DGSP	1.047,4	29,2%	542,7	16,4%
DGIT	66,4	1,8%	105,6	3,2%
DGAP	449,1	12,5%	463,9	14,0%
DGMO	35,2	1,0%	37,2	1,1%
DGUE	24,3	0,7%	29,1	0,9%
DGDP*	-	-	186,2	5,6%
Totale	3.587,2	100,0%	3.304,7	100,0%

Fonte: DGRI - valori in milioni di Euro

Figure 13: Budget MAECI, by competences (Statistical Yearbook MAECI 2022)

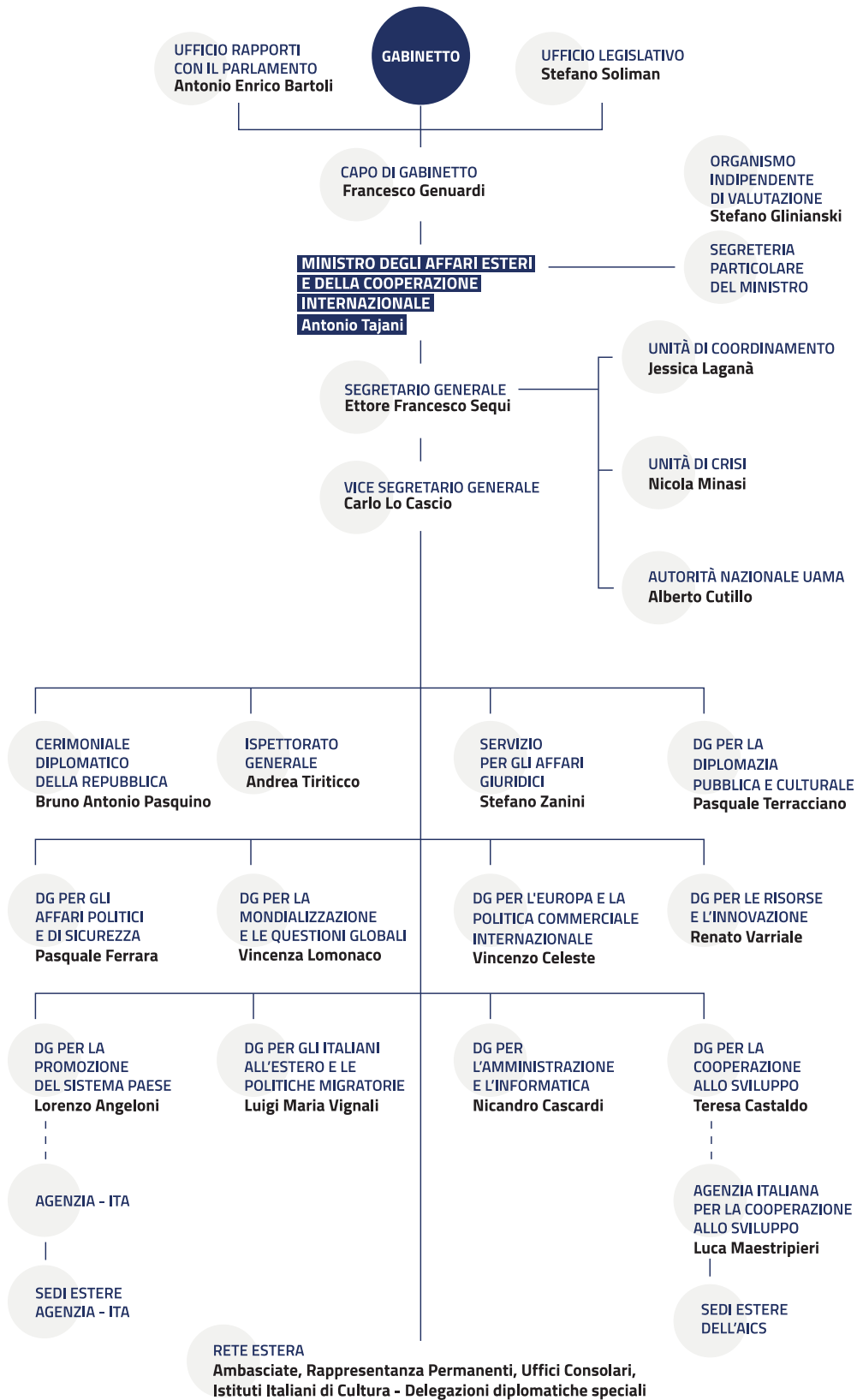


Figure 14: Organization Chart MAECI (www.esteri.it 2023)

2 The Crisis Unit

2.1 Architecture

The Crisis Unit is a fundamental organ of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. As such, it is at the direct dependences of the Secretary General, that represents the highest administrative authority within the Ministry.

The Unit responds to specific needs of the evolving society surrounding us: new risks and different threats, along with the increasing of abroad travels in every part of the world, have completely changed the landscape of national security, leading to stronger demands for assistance, prevention and information measures⁵⁶.

The Unit is an essential component of the architecture of the Ministry in the achievement of its tasks: it was set up during the 1980s as a department charged with ensuring the protection of Italian citizens abroad, especially in times of emergency, in conjunction with the other institutions of the State that are assigned the specific function of ensuring national security.

It is a responsive and flexible structure, it is active 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, it's composed of nearly 30 people who are both diplomats and administrative officers. In order to carry out its duties, the Crisis Unit can rely on a sophisticated system of technology, that allows the Unit to promptly respond to any threat that may occur, in terms of military or political activities, as well as natural disasters⁵⁷.

One of the main tasks of the Office is data collection, monitoring and analysis of the potential dangers that could promptly cause an emergency. This system of risks analysis can rely upon different resources, such as embassies, consular offices, departments of the State Administration as police forces or the Ministry of Defence, International Organizations, agencies of the intelligence, and even other public sources such as the press, business stakeholders, companies or NGOs. In fact, the information necessary for the well-functioning of the Crisis Unit, in order to carry out its duties and to plan rescue operations, for instance, come from a variety of sources, that are of two types: open sources, such as the institutional ones, and closed sources, through the creation of all-

⁵⁶ https://www.esteri.it/it/unita_crisi/

⁵⁷ Information acquired during the conversation between the author and the permanent staff of the Crisis Unit (that took place the 5th January 2023)

inclusive fact sheets with data taken from the Unit's websites⁵⁸. The Crisis Unit places the emphasis on prevention and that is why it offers useful information to citizens before they leave, but since it does not have the power to prohibit, it can only advise them against travelling to places at high level of risk.

With this respect, the Crisis Unit has developed a detailed database of the Italian presence around the world, creating a complex system in which every citizen willing to travel abroad can voluntarily report personal data, in total respect of privacy norms: "In order to obtain information on the presence of temporary Italian travelers in all the countries of the world, it has concluded agreements with the tour operators' trade associations: in case of need, it is possible to obtain in real time, on a software compatible with the programmes used by the Crisis Unit, the data on those who have purchased a tourist package to travel to a specific country. To make this work tool more effective, the Crisis Unit has also created the website www.dovesiamonelmondo.it."⁵⁹ Consequently, this system allows the Unit to act more quickly in cases of crisis, that can be managed through a clear scheduling of rescue operations. Moreover, risk communication is pursued also through the employment of another website, www.viaggiasesicuri.it, that overall assist people when dealing with safety and health conditions in countries of destination. The Unit, through the site, wants to create special and particular warnings for citizens, accompanied by more general information on the country of destination such as entry formalities. In addition to the existence of these two sites, there are regular security briefings that aim to inform and share a culture of prevention with citizens, businesses and NGOs.

The information contained in the Crisis Unit's databases is analysed to prepare emergency and evacuation plans, which are created on the basis of the different nature of risks and threats within each country. The contingency plans are combined with an analysis of the size and location of Italian citizens. "Fundamental to the preparation of the plans is the collaboration with the European Union and the European structures in charge of protecting citizens in emergency situations abroad. The continuous consultation between the different European capitals allows a fruitful exchange of information and analysis, as

⁵⁸ Ibidem

⁵⁹ S. Baldi, *Ministero degli Affari Esteri Guida alla Farnesina*, DGRI Istituto Diplomatico, ISDI Press (2012)

well as the development of common security arrangements for particularly exposed scenarios. Coordination aims at achieving two fundamental objectives to guarantee an orderly and effective management of emergencies: the indispensable rapidity and informality of decisions and the unambiguousness of the decision-making chain" ⁶⁰ . Consular protection remains, however, under the EU Treaty, the prerogative of nation states. However, every European citizen enjoys, in the territory of a third country where there is no representation of his or her own, the protection of the diplomatic and consular authorities of any other State of the Union ⁶¹ .

One of the main key-feature of the Crisis Unit is the constant exchange of information and data with the other organs of the State Administration: the Unit repeatedly collaborate with police forces, the Ministry of Defence, intelligence, other crisis units of Foreign Affairs Ministry of other countries, especially of the EU; the responsive intervention of the Unit is given also by the cooperation with members of civil society like the private sector and NGOs.

The Crisis Unit takes into account two types of crisis ⁶²: natural disasters, and induced disasters. Natural disasters result from unpredictable events, like earthquakes, pandemics, or floods; on the contrary, induced catastrophes result from intentional actions: terrorism, military invasion, threats to national security. Consequently, the main fields of operation of the Crisis Unit are: socio-political crises, terrorism, natural disasters, health emergencies and piracy. With this respect, a crisis is described as a state of disruption that directly or indirectly poses a threat to Italian citizens in the world. From this particular definition of crisis, strictly linked to the duties carried out by the Unit, we can conclude that the occurrence of every crisis (in terms of natural disaster or induced catastrophe) depends on two key-elements: an objective factor, namely the risks existing in a given country, and a subjective factor, namely the presence of Italian citizens in that country (whether the number of Italian citizens is more or less numerous).

⁶⁰ Website www.esteri.it

⁶¹ S. Baldi, G. Nesi (a cura di), *Diplomatici. 33 saggi su aspetti giuridici e politici della diplomazia contemporanea*, Università degli Studi di Trento (2018)

⁶² Interview to the former Head of the Crisis Unit Amb. Stefano Verrecchia (source https://www.esteri.it/mae/resource/pubblicazioni/2019/10/newsletter_7-2019.pdf)

In recent decades, crisis situations have changed, acquiring an increasingly global character. For this reason, the Crisis Unit attributes great importance to the preventive character and to the study of possible dangers for the Italian community in the world.

Prevention activities are therefore based on an informal network that discourages Italian citizens from travelling to countries at risk, on interstate cooperation, but also on collaboration with non-state actors such as NGOs or multinational companies. In this regard, the website www.dovesiamonelmondo.it dedicates a category to companies; in fact, in 2011, many employees of companies in Libya fell victims of the civil war and from that moment on, multinational companies began to directly inform the Crisis Unit of the travels abroad of their staff.

The Crisis Unit can be compared to an autonomous bubble within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation: its main object is the prevention of emergency situations. Prevention takes place through the operations room, that I had the honor to visit, and through the app “Unità di Crisi”, that put together the duties performed by the two websites www.dovesiamonelmondo.it and www.viaggiasesicuri.it . Thanks to the app, the Unit monitors Italian presence in the world, allowing Italians to voluntarily report their presence abroad and thus guaranteeing greater speed and efficiency to the Crisis Unit in planning rescue operations.

Furthermore, efforts have recently been made to create a safety network with universities, especially for internationally mobile students (i.e. Erasmus students) ⁶³.

Terrorism is also one of the main field of competence of the Crisis Unit, as the action of the Unit is decisive in this sector and is carried out through prevention operations, assistance to citizens and the use of intelligence analysis also at a European level. In fact, the Unit analyses trends and strategies of international terrorism by comparing them with the presence of Italian citizens in the world. When prevention is not possible, the Unit is prepared for a direct intervention ⁶⁴. In addition, the main measures of counter-terrorism are related to cooperation in prevention, which takes place by means of shared

⁶³ Interview to the former Head of the Crisis Unit Amb. Stefano Verrecchia (source https://www.esteri.it/mae/resource/pubblicazioni/2019/10/newsletter_7-2019.pdf)

⁶⁴ Information acquired during the conversation between the author and the permanent staff of the Crisis Unit (that took place the 5th January 2023)

information-technology systems within the European Union: it is an attempt to harmonize policies at EU level, but each country has a different sensitivity and thus it is still difficult to make operations homogeneous on a European scale ⁶⁵.

In the case of a terroristic attack, the method of intervention of the Crisis Unit is based on the news of a terrorist attack, which may come from an embassy, the intelligence services or a citizen ⁶⁶. From this moment, the Crisis Unit staff tries to figure out the number of people involved in the attack with information from available sites, the EU or other institutional and non-institutional bodies. Therefore, since not every citizen is registered on the websites, it is not to be considered completely accountable⁶⁷. Information and operational instructions are then provided to the citizen involved, by email, SMS, or with push notifications from the Crisis Unit app, on how to handle the emergency.

The search for people is initially carried out by the embassy in question, depending on the organization of the country under attack; the embassy then communicates the information to the Crisis Unit, which, in conjunction with the Ministry of the Interior, starts the search directly on the spot. Experienced personnel are sent on a mission to search for people and to recognize the DNA of victims of a terrorist attack. Another branch of the search is social networks such as Twitter, Whatsapp or Facebook's safety check service.

From this moment onwards, the management of the crisis takes place, with data entered into the database. The Crisis Unit has to contact not only embassies and local police forces, but also families of the Italian citizen abroad in order to provide assistance and information ⁶⁸.

The mission of the Crisis Unit is the protection of Italian citizens abroad in situations of emergency. The main areas of operative action are international terrorism, social and political tensions, natural disasters, pandemics, health catastrophes; the Unit reports

⁶⁵ Puleo L., *Summary of Party Positions on EU Foreign, Security and Defence Policy. Case studies: France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland and Spain*, IAI Research Papers (2022)

⁶⁶ Information acquired during the conversation between the author and the permanent staff of the Crisis Unit (that took place the 5th January 2023)

⁶⁷ Ibidem

⁶⁸ Ibidem

directly to the Secretary General. It was established in the second half of the 1980s, after the Achille Lauro incident ⁶⁹, a terroristic attack that frightened the entire world. In fact, the Achille Lauro was a cruise ship under Italian flag, departed from Genova with nearly 545 passengers, most of them were of Italian citizenship; when the ship arrived in Egyptian seas, it was hijacked by four armed men belonging to the Palestine Liberation Front. The managing of such crisis determined the so-called Sigonella crisis, one of the toughest point in the diplomatic relations between Italy and the USA since the 2nd world war. Despite Italian government has arranged with its military forces a rescue operation, the diplomatic solution and negotiations allowed to resolve the crisis, with only one death, an American Jewish man. During the Achille Lauro hijacking, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs created a specific unit within the Directorate-General for Political Affairs and Security, with the specific object of cooperating with other State administrations in order to rescue the lives of those who were on the cruise ship; specifically, the Unit had to cooperate and get into contacts with the relatives of the victims, and manage the repatriation of those who have been involved in the hijacking. This was an initial form of what later became the Crisis Unit. Basically, the key-feature, that led to the establishment of the Unit, was the capacity to respond promptly and to manage crisis with efficacy and humanity (especially in the relations with the parents of the victims): indeed, in the case of the Achille Lauro hijacking, the time frame in which the Unit had to operate was extremely brief, everything took place in only three days, from 7th to 10th October 1985. From that point on, the Crisis Unit has developed in many ways and in different fields, its jurisdiction has broadened, but the focal point is that in its evolving structure, the efficacy of the Unit's operations has been generally acknowledged, acquiring more and more international prestige in managing emergency. As Amb. Elisabetta Belloni, former Head of the Crisis Unit and former Secretary General, highlighted with respect to the efficacy of the activities carried out by the Crisis Unit and to the model of attraction also for foreign institutions: "It is a structure that is known not only in Italy, but all over the world. With great pride, I remember that many foreign countries wanted to visit these

⁶⁹ Former Official Website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

offices to be able to draw from our experience those elements that would allow them to create a similar body”⁷⁰.

In the two charts below, it is demonstrated how the resources are shared among the different competences, with regard to the activities of assistance to Italian citizens abroad. The first chart focuses on the distribution by geography of the resources pertaining to the rescue of Italian travelers, expressed both in absolute values and percentage.

Area geografica	2020	Quota %	2021	Quota %
Unione europea	1.032.926	9,2%	633.624	8,5%
Europa (extra UE)	423.221	3,8%	334.388	4,5%
Americhe	7.145.110	63,6%	5.086.428	68,6%
Mediterraneo e M.O.	870.216	7,7%	406.252	5,5%
Africa sub-sahariana	1.038.259	9,2%	536.470	7,2%
Asia e Oceania	723.267	6,4%	422.588	5,7%
Totale	11.232.999	100%	7.419.750	100%

Fonte: DGIT - valori in euro

Figure 15: MAECI resources for rescue operations, by geography (Statistical Yearbook MAECI 2022)

⁷⁰ Foreign Affairs Ministry Note on “30 years alongside Italians around the world” (17 December 2019) (source https://www.esteri.it/it/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/comunicati/2019/12/30-anni-al-fianco-degli-italiani-nel-mondo/)

	2019	2020	2021
A) interventi di protezione consolare coordinati dalla DGIT			
Interventi di tutela dei cittadini italiani all'estero	44.552	119.115	77.377
Interventi di tutela dei cittadini europei non rappresentati nei Paesi extra UE	19	88	13
Rimpatri di salme di connazionali deceduti all'estero	1.336	1.259	1.158
Rimpatri sanitari	83	95	64
Ricerche connazionali scomparsi	1.087	579	460
Totale A)	47.077	121.136	79.072
"Dove Siamo nel Mondo"			
Viaggi registrati	839.455	322.788	155.766
Missioni di protezione delle Rappresentanze diplomatiche e degli Uffici consolari a rischio			
Missioni affidate ai militari dell'Arma dei Carabinieri	521	463	501
B) interventi coordinati dall'Unità di crisi in contesti di rischio			
Allarmi sanitari	58	30.000	5
Attentati	53	22	22
Atti di pirateria	1	-	-
Decessi di connazionali	8	-	1
Dirottamenti aerei	-	-	-
Disastri e calamità naturali	100	35	58
Evacuazioni	-	-	-
Incidenti aerei e navali	24	8	8
Missioni e Joint Survery Teams	16	-	-
Rimpatri salme	8	-	8
Rimpatri sanitari	1	2	8
Sequestri di connazionali	6	6	-
Teleconferenze e videoconferenze	68	223	136
Tensioni socio-politiche	219	69	125
Totale B)	562	30.365	371

Fonte: DGIT - ISPE - Unità di crisi

Figure 16: Crisis Unit activities of assistance and protection (Statistical Yearbook MAECI 2022)

2.2 Crisis Management

The best way to deal with crises is to avoid them. For this reason, prevention strategies are key-tools of the Crisis Unit, that is prepared to predispose a course of action to be followed when a crisis arises, a professional blueprint on how to deal with emergencies⁷¹. The Unit, in pursuing its duties, structures detailed analysis outlining the main processes in managing crises, an executive summary of the operativity. The development of crisis prevention as part of strategic management is essential for any organization and in any sector⁷² : when an important change happens, in the terms of socio-political tensions, natural disasters or health emergency, to define a comprehensive strategy is of necessary importance, as a set of actions that indicate the direction to follow when managing emergency. A useful and proper blueprint on how to address situations of radical transformation, is based on a series of steps and key-tools that, whenever a catastrophe takes place, should be implemented automatically, to preventively meet the challenge: a quick response to a potential situation of crisis is crucial. With this regard, it's important to gather information on all issues, and to keep up-to-date matters that might evolve into a hypothetical crisis: these matters might be external or internal, but whenever a crisis arises it's fundamental that the Unit's strategy is already established, so that it may adapt its procedures to new and evolving circumstances. In addition, another important feature when developing a prevention strategy is to acquire information: monitoring and assessing the internal and external environment is extremely importance.

Along with a defined strategy and an action plan including the main crisis scenarios, an effective crisis management should also focuses on the importance of team-working⁷³. Indeed, team working is required as a fundamental instrument to successfully master crises: a prompt reaction to an emergency is based on a unified and structured coordination of tasks within members of a team, that acknowledge to reach and to work altogether for a common goal. Accordingly, the Crisis Unit is composed of nearly 30 members, each of them with different responsibilities and tasks: it is a structured

⁷¹ https://www.esteri.it/it/unita_crisi/

⁷² T. Coombs, S. J. Holladay, *The Handbook of Crisis Communication*, Willy-Blackwell (2009)

⁷³ Ibidem

organization of responsibilities, as such, the Unit is built on a clear and unique coordination of work, the team is small and compact, based on chain of command and leadership.

Additionally, another substantial aspect of the Crisis Unit of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is the efficient communication that is developed during situation of emergency⁷⁴: in order to communicate with the relatives of a victim, it's necessary to adopt a professional and human behavior, since the content of the communication may shock the parents of someone who has been imprisoned abroad, for example, or who has been declared missing. For this reason, communication during crisis is vital, as to be intended as distinguished in internal communication and external communication ⁷⁵: internal communication regards the division of competences and tasks within the Crisis Unit, that is structured upon a clear coordination of responsibilities, in terms of both horizontal (following the hierarchical order, the chain of command) and vertical communication, a matter that has just been addressed; on the other hand, external communication is primary as well, since the scope of consultation with the parents of the victims, the timing, the instruments adopted and even the tone of voice are all factors that determine the operativity of the Crisis Unit ⁷⁶. In fact, communication during crisis is key, a fundamental but at the same time critical topic to be handled: for example, it's primary that any news concerning the identity of a subject that is missing or imprisoned abroad, are given by the Crisis Unit, not by the press, due to the fact that the staff of the Crisis Unit is specifically trained to cope with emergency situations, and as representatives of the Italian State they are the most suitable individuals to make it done. When dealing with external communication, the Unit's content of conversation with the parents of those who are at serious risks in a foreign country has to be clear, uniform, based on information gathering, but most of all it has to be professional and human, two aspects that every member of the

⁷⁴ Information acquired during the conversation between the author and the permanent staff of the Crisis Unit (that took place the 5th January 2023)

⁷⁵ T. Coombs, S. J. Holladay, *The Handbook of Crisis Communication*, Willy-Blackwell (2009)

⁷⁶ Interview to the former Head of the Crisis Unit Amb. Stefano Verrecchia (link https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/politica/2019/07/11/forum-ansa-con-stefano-verrecchia-capo-dellunita-di-crisi-della-farnesina_7498dc71-f887-4ef8-9003-929b0a971670.html)

Crisis Unit embodies. The importance of crisis communication if of key-necessity, in order to promptly react to any problem that may arise.

2.3 Geopolitical Perspective

Nowadays, crises are taking place more and more, and in a more severe way than in the past: more than ever, cooperation is needed in order to face the geopolitical challenges⁷⁷. Crisis takes place within a certain social, political and economic context: emergency may happen at regional level, such as in the case of a civil war within a foreign country or a political uprising as in Lybia after the crumbling of Gheddafi regime, or even at global level, such as in the case of Covid-19 pandemic, a case-study that will be broadly discussed in the following chapter. We live in a globalized world, in the international arena every country, to a more or less extent, is intertwined with one another, in terms of trade agreement for instance, or energy security, or military alliances. Borders are changing, as regional crises can turn into national or global emergency, representing a critical turning point in which the catastrophe in question may spread over the entire region or world, like in the cases of a pandemic, an health emergency or a military invasion causing famine, poverty and destruction, in a kind of multiplying effect where the issues at stake become more and more.

With this respect, globalization, despite the positive effects, has created a broader space of uncertainty, that is triggering a new way of conceiving geopolitics⁷⁸.

Therefore, geopolitics “looks at the ways in which international affairs can be understood through geographical factors: not just the physical landscape – the natural barriers of mountains or connections of river networks, for example – but also climate, demographics, cultural regions and access to natural resources. Factors such as these can have an important impact on many different aspects of our civilization, from political and

⁷⁷ S. Martuscelli, *How to Reconcile Borders with the Promotion of a More Open, Integrated and Democratic World?*, IAI Commentaries (2022) (link <https://www.iai.it/it/pubblicazioni/how-reconcile-borders-promotion-more-open-integrated-and-democratic-world>)

⁷⁸ M. Di Liddo, V. Camporini, A. Ferrari, *Ukraine: Italy and Europe in the new geopolitical scenarios*, Hearing at the Chamber of Deputies Committee III (Foreign Affairs), 11 March 2014 (link <https://www.iai.it/en/eventi/ukraine-italy-and-europe-new-geopolitical-scenarios-hearing-experts>)

military strategy to human social development, including language, trade, and religion”⁷⁹. Physical landscape underpin national and international politics: it occupies a key-role in shaping international relations, since geopolitics affects every country and every event. Technology is an actual tool for reducing the distances between men, in respect of both physical and mental distance, but since the ages of Hannibal, that had to circumvent all Europe with Northern-African elephants to invade the Italian peninsula from the Alps, geopolitics have always been a decisive factor in determining historical events and shaping international relations.

Geopolitics is strictly correlated to international security: within our analysis, it’s relevant to focus the attention on a model of political risk. In 2016, three scholars (Baker, Davis, Bloom) developed a totally new political risk model ⁸⁰, namely a system called VAR (Vector Auto Regression), that was designed in order to measure Economic Policy Uncertainty (EPU). Due to the rapidity in which the balance of the safest and strongest countries may unexpectedly decrease ⁸¹, evaluating the state of political uncertainty has become necessary in order to promptly handle every kind of problems that may, all of a sudden, occur. For this reason, it was created the statistical methodology called VAR, a measure of political uncertainty, whose index has dramatically increased in coincidence with moments of crises, such as the 9/11 terroristic attacks, the financial crisis in 2008, the Gulf Wars. The peaks of such index, indicating the high level of political uncertainty, coincide with historical disasters: a growth in political uncertainty usually advances a reduction in production and employment of the country in question.

The chart below shows the EPU for Italy ⁸², since, in the next chapter, the analysis will focus on the case-study of Italy and how the Crisis Unit faced Covid-19 pandemic.

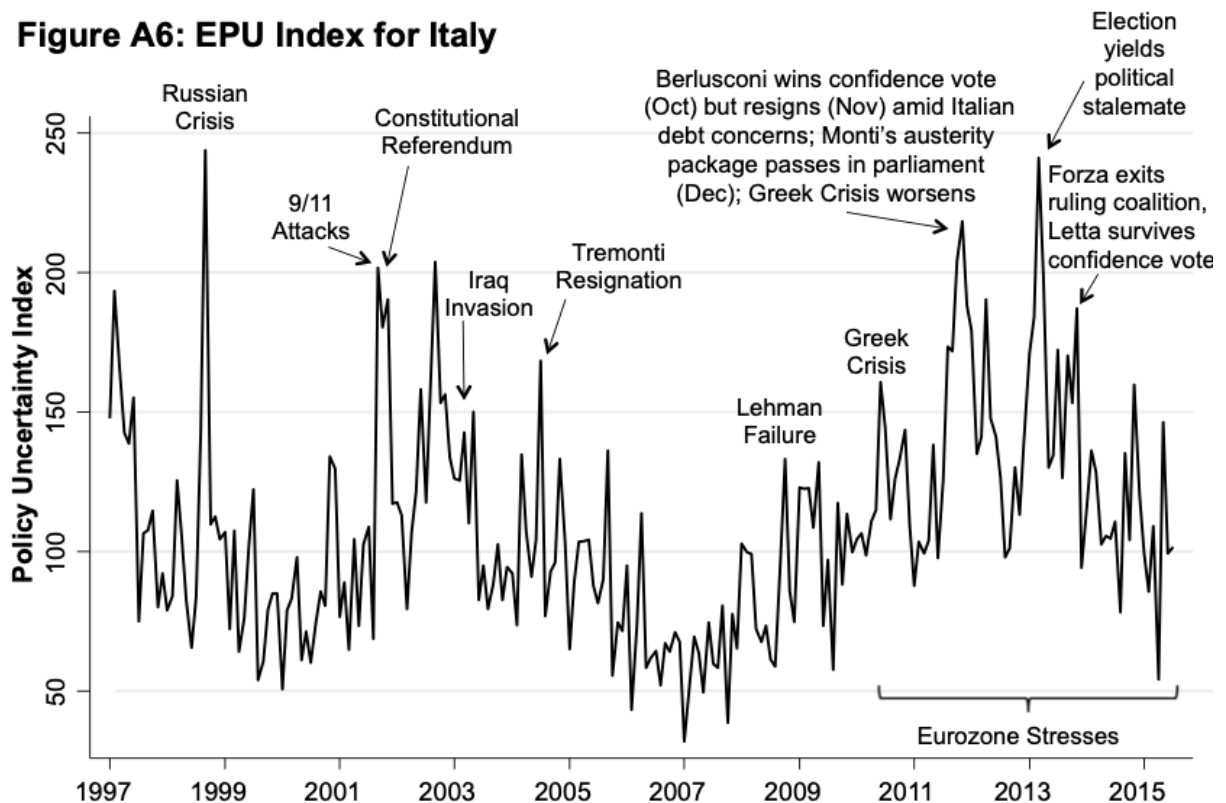
⁷⁹ T. Marshall, *Prisoners of Geography. Ten Maps that Explain Everything About the World*, Palgrave MacMillan (2015)

⁸⁰ S. Baker, N. Bloom, S. Davis, *Measuring Economic Policy Uncertainty*, R. Barro and L. Katz (2016) (source https://www.policyuncertainty.com/media/EPU_BBD_Mar2016.pdf)

⁸¹ I. Bremmer, *The J Curve: A New Way to Understand Why Nations Rise and Fall*, Simon and Schuster (2006)

⁸² S. Baker, N. Bloom, S. Davis, *Measuring Economic Policy Uncertainty*, R. Barro and L. Katz (2016) (source https://www.policyuncertainty.com/media/EPU_BBD_Mar2016.pdf)

Figure A6: EPU Index for Italy



Notes: Index reflects scaled monthly counts of articles containing 'uncertain' or 'uncertainty', 'economic' or 'economy', and one or more policy-relevant terms: 'tax', 'policy', 'regulation', 'spending', 'deficit', 'budget', or 'central bank'. The series is normalized to mean 100 from 1997 to 2009 and based on the following newspapers: La Stampa and Corriere Della Sera.

Figure 17: Economic Policy Uncertainty for Italy

(https://www.policyuncertainty.com/media/EPU_BBD_Mar2016.pdf 2016)

Geopolitics and security are two main fields of action of the Crisis Unit, that is specifically aimed at guaranteeing the protection of Italian citizens abroad in times of emergency.

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “kidnappings, terrorism, socio-political tensions, natural disasters, piracy, serious health emergencies and pandemics are the cases in which the Crisis Unit goes into action. [...] Five are the areas of activity of the Crisis Unit:

1. Risk analysis,
2. Monitoring the Italian presence in the world,
3. Prevention and information,
4. Preparation and verification of emergency plans

5. Crisis management and operational interventions.

The Crisis Unit makes use of various tools that have evolved - over the years - to improve its response and the timing of its operations: the websites Viaggiare Sicuri, Dove siamo nel Mondo and the Crisis Unit App “⁸³. Indeed, through these three services, the Crisis Unit can rely upon a sophisticated system that allows the Unit to be always prepared during moments of political uncertainty, in coincidence with crises.

Furthermore, the website www.viaggiasesicuri.it, developed by the Crisis Unit, shows with extreme clarity the difference geopolitical scenarios around the world, where the level of risks is higher. In fact, the website provides citizens with fact-sheets for every country, containing essential information on safety, on the health situation and on mobility, as well as warnings and updates relevant to travellers that wish to fly to certain countries. The fact-sheets also include continuous updated profiles for every country: general information, regarding security and safety, health situation, weather conditions, precautions to take, and useful links. It is a service precisely envisaged to promote a conscious and responsible travelling choices, an appropriate behaviour for Italian citizens travelling in areas of possible risk. Hence, the Crisis Unit asks everyone to check the website viaggiasesicuri.it before leaving for any country in the world, and even during the travel for any updates concerning the country of destination, because the state of security of foreign nations, as well as the normative measures regulating public order and sanitary conditions, may rapidly change. For this reason, the Unit is involved in issuing continuous updates: it publishes detailed and daily advices in the section “Highlights”, providing the latest announcements in the “Country Profiles” of the homepage; further, the interactive map of the world, shown in the two images below, indicates the main warnings and the most significant health risk conditions, with daily updates on the Covid-19 situation within a specific country. In other words, the Crisis Unit has a specific duty of monitoring the geopolitical scenarios around the world, assessing the capacity of its structure to responsively face the main threats, and advising citizens on the main risks that derive from such situations of crises. This second feature is carried out through the system of ViaggiareSicuri.it, that delivers up-to-date analysis of the main warnings around the world; the Crisis Unit, from this perspective, is specifically committed to

⁸³ <https://www.viaggiasesicuri.it/about>

examine the global geopolitical scenarios in order to elaborate an in-depth evaluation of the threats, which are strictly dependent upon geopolitical factors. The staff of the Crisis Unit have the professional qualification to process data and acquire knowledge from a geopolitical perspective, that is essential for the work of the Unit. For having the capacity to respond promptly to any emergency, it's key to have a clear notion of geopolitics.

The two maps below ⁸⁴ indicate the main risks for every region of the world, focusing on the different national regulations relating to Covid-19 situation around the globe.

As a matter of fact, the geopolitical landscape is increasingly transforming, as sustained by many scholars, “the world order is fragmenting without a clear organizing principle to follow. [...] The relative recovery of countries from Covid-19, and the degree to which they are weakened or strengthened as a result, is found to play a significant role in shaping the future geopolitical landscape” ⁸⁵. The recovery from Covid-19 will determine the future geopolitical scenarios and how the resilience of the international community will react to the several perturbation of the world order.

Finally, due to the fact that the case-study analyzed in the third chapter covers how Covid-19 crisis was handled by the Crisis Unit from a geopolitical point of view, the practical case presented in the second image below focuses on Europe and Italy, showing the main warnings relating to Covid-19 and other situation of crises.

⁸⁴ <https://www.viaggiaresicuri.it/home>

⁸⁵ S. Brannen, *Four Scenarios for Geopolitical Order in 2025-2030: What Will Great Power Competition Look Like?*, Center for Strategic & International Studies (2020) (link <https://www.csis.org/analysis/four-scenarios-geopolitical-order-2025-2030-what-will-great-power-competition-look>)



Figure 18: Global geopolitical risks (<https://www.viaggiasesicuri.it/home> 2023)

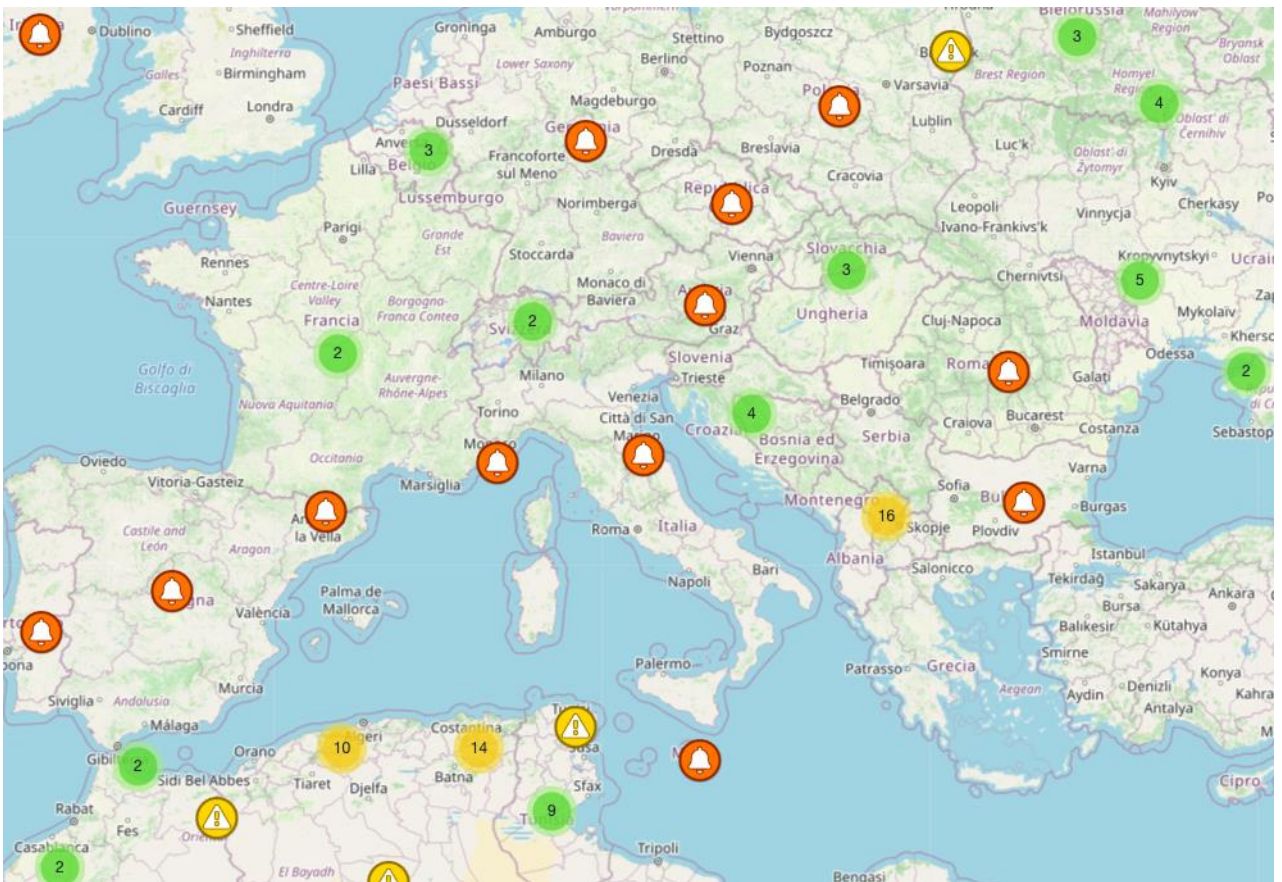


Figure 19: Geopolitical risks for Italy (<https://www.viaggiasesicuri.it/home> 2023)

3 Case-study: how the Crisis Unit managed Covid-19 crisis

3.1 Case study

This chapter deals with the case-study of how the Crisis Unit of the Foreign Affairs Ministry managed the crisis relating to Covid-19 pandemic. The intention is to provide an empirical analysis of crisis management operated by the Crisis Unit.

It will be presented different references to practical cases, basically in terms of repatriation of Italian citizens conducted by the Crisis Unit, with the purpose of examining the operativity of the Unit. The methodology adopted and the sources are therefore based on the personal experience of the author, that had the opportunity to visit the Crisis Unit of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to get into contacts with the staff of the Unit, and to acquire an in-depth knowledge of the capacities of the Ministry in managing emergency.

Covid-19 pandemic sparked a series of catastrophes around the world: from a geopolitical perspective, Covid acted as a multiplier of crises all over the world, both at regional and global level. As already highlighted in the previous chapter, crises break up the balance of international order, resulting in catastrophic geopolitical implications: the recovery from Covid-19, a global crisis, plays a key-role in determining the future geopolitical landscape ⁸⁶.

The unity of international community was on the brink, as individualism seemed the only possible solution during a time when the borders of every country abruptly shut down. All of a sudden, interstate cooperation ceased to function: geopolitical scenarios were dramatic.

Not only in relation to deaths (it is estimated that more than 6 million people died of Covid pandemic ⁸⁷), but also in terms of further emergency that stemmed from Covid: high-inflation rates, general price increase, growing (youth) unemployment, if we wouldn't mention the psychological consequences.

⁸⁶ S. Brannen, *Four Scenarios for Geopolitical Order in 2025-2030: What Will Great Power Competition Look Like?*, Center for Strategic & International Studies (2020) (link <https://www.csis.org/analysis/four-scenarios-geopolitical-order-2025-2030-what-will-great-power-competition-look>)

⁸⁷ According to the World Health Organization <https://covid19.who.int>

Italy has been the first European country to be affected so critically: the first registered case of coronavirus in Italy was confirmed the 31st January 2020, while so far the number of positive cases has been of more than 25 millions people, and the deaths around 187 thousand individuals ⁸⁸.

The Crisis Unit was deeply involved when the crisis arose, as, in conjunction with the other State administrations, it had to defend national security, it had to guarantee the safety of Italian citizens all over the world.

Specifically, the Unit had to cope with the requests of thousands of Italian citizens that were abroad for a variety of reasons (business, study, work, holiday) but were not able to come back since the borders of the countries were closed and flights were cancelled.

According to the information acquired while talking with the personnel of the Crisis Unit, the key-feature of the staff working for the protection of Italian citizens is the humanity that underpins their activity. “The Crisis Unit deals with the management of emergencies, as it represents the body that, with the greatest professionalism and humanity, can not only communicate with the loved ones of the persons involved, but also at an institutional level coordinate the various organs and manage the crisis to find the compatriots abroad” ⁸⁹. The Head of the Crisis Unit from 2012 to 2017 Amb. Claudio Taffuri stresses the importance of “truth” that the Unit has to vehiculate when dealing with crisis management; the communication with the loved ones of the victims has to be clear and calm at the same time, since the personnel of the Crisis Unit is acting as representatives of the State, as a part of the State’s administration ⁹⁰.

Whenever a warning reaches the operations room, the Crisis Unit usually follows the sequent steps ⁹¹:

- First of all, it’s important to rapidly understand the kind of notification (missing of an Italian citizen abroad, or imprisonment, or health emergency as in the case-

⁸⁸ Italian Ministry of Health (source www.salute.gov.it)

⁸⁹ Interview to the former Head of Crisis Unit Amb. Claudio Taffuri (16th May 2014) (source Foreign Affairs Ministry YouTube channel <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWpnLOnYSGw>)

⁹⁰ Ibidem

⁹¹ Information acquired during the conversation between the author and the permanent staff of the Crisis Unit (that took place the 5th January 2023)

study under analysis), since the following procedure depends on the type of warning in question, resulting in a different *modus operandi*;

- Information gathering of every details concerning the matter, through the interlocution with other State's organs and with the other institutions of the diplomatic network: usually, the embassy in question where the crisis is taking place is one of the first organ that mobilizes every resources in order to acquire the highest amount of information relating to the emergency in question;
- Contact the institutional bodies that represent the administrative and political authorities, above all the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Secretary General (the two highest political and administrative authorities within the Foreign Affairs Ministry), in order to receive more indication on the direction to follow;
- Get in touch with the relatives of the persons involved in the crisis abroad, trying to transmit to them a sense of sympathy and proficiency.

Moreover, differently from other situations of imprisonment or missing person, in the case-study of Covid-19 emergency, the Crisis Unit had to contact Italian citizens abroad. In fact, due to the closure of frontiers in nearly most countries of the world, people were not allowed to return to Italy, not only because many flights were cancelled but also because countries denied to many airline companies the legal authorization to fly to Italy. Consequently, the Crisis Unit had to get in touch with everyone of those people stuck in foreign states, mainly through Italian embassies and consulates of every country where Italian citizens were not given the possibility to go home: the diplomatic network took on a necessary role in allowing a fruitful and prompt interlocution, acting as intermediary organ between the Crisis Unit and the citizens abroad. Also, the embassies had to verify the sanitary conditions of the Italian community within their hosting country, in order to assess their main needs and to communicate them to the Foreign Affairs Ministry. The embassy, in gathering information, got to contact with the other sub-units of the diplomatic network within their country, such as General Consulates, Honorary Consulates and Italian Institutional Culture, in order to reach every member of Italian presence on their territory. All the diplomatic network, in the context of Covid-19, responsively mobilize for rescuing the lives of thousands of people, resulting in a successful operation of synergy between the different institutions of the State.

The Unit, indeed, in managing the Covid-19 crisis, has worked in strict conjunction with: embassies, consular offices, other institutions of the diplomatic network, the other State's administrations (as police forces and the Ministry of Defense), as well as the other DGs of the Foreign Affairs Ministry.

In Italy, Covid-19 crisis broke out when the first case of coronavirus was confirmed: two Chinese tourists were isolated at the Spallanzani Hospital the 31st January 2020. On that same day, the Italian government suspended all the flights to and from China, and introduced a state of emergency.

Few weeks later, the virus has spread all over the country starting from the North (the first endogenous cluster of coronavirus was registered the 21st February 2020 in Codogno, Lombardy, with almost 16 positive cases⁹²), leading Italian health system nearly to collapse. Since Italy was the first European country where Covid arrived, at first the neighboring countries adopted a sort of discriminatory behavior, similar to the one against Chinese people when Covid-19 started to spread from Wuhan market. Suddenly, many European countries decided to shut their borders with Italy, in order to prevent the disease to affect their territory, that however was inevitable. Italy was risking to remain isolated at European and international level, an issue that could have had a devastating effect on Italy's international relations, causing catastrophic geopolitical implications.

The evidence of such isolation threats has been testified by two notes published by the Foreign Affairs Ministry in March 2020: "since yesterday, the Ministry has been closely following the development of the transit situation, in particular of goods, at the border with Slovenia, with whose authorities there were intensive contacts during the night and again this morning. [...] to reiterate the need to ensure that the albeit understandable border control measures are proportionate and do not go beyond what is really necessary. In particular, the transit of vehicles and the transport of goods should not be prevented in the interest of all. It is also essential that these measures are agreed upon as far as possible between the neighboring states and that the European authorities are informed in

⁹² Italian Ministry of Health (source www.salute.gov.it)

advance“⁹³. In that same day (13th March 2020), arguments were reported with Switzerland, where the problem regarded trans-border issues relating to the high number of sanitary controls at the frontier between Italy and Switzerland: "Today I met the Swiss Ambassador in Rome, Rita Adam, to discuss with her the situation of Italian border workers. Together we agreed on the importance of ensuring the continued opening of the border between the two countries and access to jobs for our workers under the highest security conditions from a health point of view. I also pointed out the additional difficulties that border crossers are encountering due to the closure of some border crossings, and asked for the utmost guarantees to be given, also with regard to the preservation of jobs and respect for the workers' need to return to their families every day, avoiding 'forced' overnight stays on the other side of the border”⁹⁴, declared the Under-Secretary of Foreign Affairs Ministry with delegation to bilateral relations with EU countries on 13th March 2020. This statement was in fact preceded by an explicative note of the Ministry with regard to the limitations to Italian borders implemented by Swiss authorities, as a consequence of Covid-19 spreading all around the country: frontiers limitations were intended to prevent the pandemic to affect Switzerland, with numerous sanitary controls on Italian citizens travelling to Switzerland. The matter concerned limitations to people and goods crossing the borders from Italy towards Switzerland. Again, the Ministry’s note is important for our analysis since this whole situation of Covid crisis represented a serious threat of isolation for Italian relations, leading to enormous geopolitical consequences: “the restrictions introduced today do not prohibit travel for proven business reasons. Unless they are subject to quarantine or have tested positive for the virus, cross-border commuters will therefore be able to enter and leave the affected territories to work and return home. Those concerned will be able to prove the work-

⁹³ Foreign Affairs Ministry Note on Slovenia (13 March 2020) (source https://www.esteri.it/it/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/comunicati/2020/03/nota-farnesina-slovenia/)

⁹⁴ Foreign Affairs Minsitry Note on Switzerland (13th March 2020) (source https://www.esteri.it/it/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/comunicati/2020/03/scalfarotto-colloquio-con-svizzera-su-situazione-frontalieri/)

related reason for travel by any means, including a statement that can be made to the police in the event of any checks. Goods can enter and leave the territories concerned “⁹⁵. Therefore, the Crisis Unit had to handle two kinds of crises relating to Covid-19 pandemic: first of all, the rescue of Italian citizens abroad, that have remained stuck due to the closure of borders; secondly, the risk of isolation, both at European and global level.

Crisis communication is difficult to manage, but the Foreign Affairs Ministry proved able to face the challenge, although the risk of isolation at international level was concrete.

The 25th February 2020, after the first confirmed cluster of coronavirus cases in Italy but before the lockdown, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, in an interview with *Corriere della Sera*, made explicit mention to crisis communication, in answering a question whether Italy was in danger of being isolated in the international arena due to Covid-19 crisis: "we are a strong, transparent and responsible country, and this is an appeal I want to send to the entire international community. We will base our communication abroad on transparency, which in these cases is the measure of reliability for a country. It is no coincidence that today I connected by teleconference with our ambassadors in Switzerland, Croatia, France, Germany, Austria, Slovenia and Munich”⁹⁶. The former Minister of Foreign Affairs, in the context of Covid-19 crisis, tried several times in reconstructing the reputation of Italy at global level, engaging in dialogue with foreign institutions and press. Indeed, in March 2020, Minister Di Maio, as the highest representative of the Italian State at international level, delivered a series of interviews with foreign newspapers, in order to rebuild the trust towards Italy as a responsible actor of the international community: this was fundamental in managing crisis communication. This is testified by the several communicates published on the website of the Foreign Affairs Ministry. For instance, Minister Di Maio made an interview with *BBC*, trying to vehiculate this sense of accountability to foreign institutions, in this case to the public

⁹⁵ Foreign Affairs Ministry Explicative Note (8th March 2020) (source https://www.esteri.it/it/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/comunicati/2020/03/nota-esplicativa-al-dpcm-8-marzo-2020/)

⁹⁶ Interview to Foreign Affairs Minister, *Corriere della Sera* (25 February 2020) (source https://www.esteri.it/it/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/interviste/2020/02/di-maio-noi-trasparenti-con-gli-altri-stati-nuove-misure-contro-il-contagio/)

opinion of Great Britain: “I would like to tell other countries in the world that there is a way to defeat this virus: Italy is available to share all the information needed, the model in place is the creation of the red zones that were first introduced in Lombardy. [...] Our job now is to support the entire public health system not only at Italian but also at European level, and find a way of having a single European unit that purchases the health-care equipment that we need”⁹⁷. The goal was to rebuild Italy’s reputation and to push international community to promptly react as a whole to this emergency.

In addition, the Minister, in his appeal to international community, asked to return to cooperation at global level: international cooperation as a tool for avoiding interstate disputes, as a need in order to overcome as a whole united community this unprecedented situation. Cooperation was necessary with the aim of guaranteeing the health-care equipment that was needed for preventing the transmission of infective disease (the so-called PPE, personal protective equipment, such as masks, gloves, foot and eye protection, respirators, face shields, full body suits). In fact, the Foreign Affairs Ministry actively mobilize for the supply of sanitary equipment, so that healthcare workers and civil society could have a sort of shield against the virus, as fundamental tools to face the crisis. Consequently, the Ministry, since the emergency broke out, has searched for masks and sanitary facilities all over the world, trying to push countries to cooperate and to work altogether for the common good: according to the Foreign Affairs Ministry, Italy, relying on international cooperation for managing this unprecedented situation, received sanitary equipment from Egypt (1,5 million masks), India (40 thousands masks), China (2,5 million masks), European countries (2 million masks), Russia (9 military aircrafts with doctors, masks and fans) and Brazil (2,5 million masks)⁹⁸, to mention only few countries that decided to help Italy.

However, at first, the reaction of international community was skeptical: not by chance, Covid-19 crisis represented one of the toughest crises since the Second World War.

⁹⁷ Interview to Foreign Affairs Minister, *BBC* (13th March 2020) (source https://www.esteri.it/it/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/interviste/2020/03/coronavirus-italy-says-1-000-have-died-but-lockdown-can-work/)

⁹⁸ Foreign Affairs Ministry Note (23rd March 2020) (source https://www.esteri.it/it/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/interviste/2020/03/di-maio-ecco-100-milioni-di-mascherine-dall-estero-il-fatto-quotidiano/)

Despite this, international cooperation was conceived in terms of information and data sharing at European and International level, through a common approach based on scientific knowledge, with the assumption that the synergy of efforts coming from different communities is able to face the challenge in a more proper and quicker way: cooperation was necessary for managing such crisis and for avoiding negative geopolitical effects on an international scale ⁹⁹.

Indeed, at the end of March, when it was generally recognized that Italy was only the first European country where the virus spread, since it affected mostly every region of the world, during such time of extreme emergency, diplomacy played a key-role in ensuring national security¹⁰⁰: Italian government relied upon the diplomatic network to obtain sufficient health equipment for fronting the sanitary crisis; ambassadors and consuls had to engage in constant interlocution with the Crisis Unit on the one hand, in order to transmit the needs of Italian citizens abroad, and, on the other hand, with foreign institutions of the hosting countries for seeking sanitary facilities and establishing multilateral relations for helping Italy to recover from the Covid-19 crisis.

Furthermore, the second crisis that derived from Covid-19, regarded the repatriation of Italian citizens from foreign countries. The Crisis Unit had to contact, through embassies, people that were not able to return to Italy, and coordinate the efforts of the organs of State's administration to get them back. In fact, with the fast spreading of Covid-19 pandemic, frontiers all over the world shut down in order to avoid the disease to affect even other territories, that instead was inevitable, unfortunately. However, the problem issued in front of the Crisis Unit, regarded thousands of people that were stuck in foreign countries for a variety of reasons (business, holiday, study, work) and that were in needs of help, with regard to sanitary conditions and safety measures. Covid-19 triggered one

⁹⁹ S. Romano, *Atlante delle Crisi Mondiali*, Mondadori (2018)

¹⁰⁰ Foreign Affairs Ministry Note (24th March 2020), when the Minister highlighted the key-role of diplomacy and geopolitical risks: "We have certain allies, like the United States. And then we have invested in friendship with China and Russia and we have done well given the help they are giving us, diplomacy saves lives. [...] There are no geopolitical risks, there are only friendly relations" (source https://www.esteri.it/it/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/interviste/2020/03/di-maio-emergenza-mascherine-risolta-anche-la-diplomazia-salva-vite-il-fatto-quotidiano/)

of the toughest crises since the recovery from World War II, resulting in unprecedented efforts to tackle the emergency.

On 29th January 2020, the Crisis Unit, for the first time in the context of Covid-19 pandemic, organized the first flight from Wuhan (where the virus started to spread) for Italian citizens that were locked in China without the possibility of coming back to Italy. It was a fundamental operation, since the day after (30th January 2020), the Italian government decided to close the borders with China, suspending all the flights to and from China; consequently, it was key, before closing the frontiers with China, to bring back Italian citizens, that after that date were not given the concrete possibility to leave Chinese territory.

“The Foreign Affairs Ministry Crisis Unit, in close coordination with the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Health, and the National Institute for Infectious Diseases 'Lazzaro Spallanzani', is organising a flight, operated by the Interforce Summit Operations Command, to repatriate Italian citizens stranded in Wuhan, the Chinese city most affected by the new coronavirus. The aircraft, scheduled to depart from Italy tomorrow once the necessary authorisations have been obtained from the Chinese side, will reach Wuhan airport directly with specialised medical personnel, nurses and appropriate medical equipment on board to ensure safe transport. Upon arrival in Italy, the compatriots will follow a health protocol defined by the Ministry of Health”¹⁰¹. The operation was organized by the Crisis Unit, according to the competences pertaining to the Unit with regards to the protection of Italian citizens abroad, in strict conjunction with the Ministry of Defense (since it was a military airplane that carried away from Wuhan Italian passengers), the Ministry of Health (with respect to the isolation period that compatriots had to follow after their arrival in Italy, and with respect to the sanitary measures adopted in order to prevent those who were in Wuhan to affect other persons), and the National Institute for Infectious Diseases “Lazzaro Spallanzani” (due to the fact that, within the airplane, there were specialized medical staff for ensuring a secure travel). In the Foreign Affairs Ministry Note, it is mentioned also the Interforce Summit

¹⁰¹ Foreign Affairs Ministry Note, *Crisis Unit organizes flight to repatriate Italian citizens from Wuhan* (29th January 2020) (source https://www.esteri.it/it/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/comunicati/2020/01/unita-di-crisi-organizza-volo-per-rimpatriare-cittadini-italiani-da-wuhan/)

Operations Command (COVI, Comando Operativo di Vertice Interforze), a body directly subordinated to the Chief of Defense Staff (Capo di Stato Maggiore della Difesa) with the purpose of facilitating command in operations in the five domains (land, sea, sky, space and cybernetic) and of ensuring the coordination of military operations; it usually acts in the context of high-level emergencies.

As already analyzed in the previous chapter, the Crisis Unit cooperates with other organs of the State in order to pursue its duties: the repatriation of Italian citizens from Wuhan was an operation of combined efforts and coaction coordinated by the Crisis Unit.

Moreover, the key-aspect of the operations of repatriation carried out by the Crisis Unit was the fact that, as representative of the Italian State, the Unit could obtain from local authorities the authorizations that instead have been denied to many airline companies, that decided to cancel flights also for this reason. As a consequence, while flights operated by private companies were always fewer, since they did not have the authorization to fly to Italy from many countries, after the spreading of Covid and the closure of borders, the Unit could instead rely on a peculiar system of State's administrations for rescuing the lives of thousands people around the world. In fact, in addition to the above-mentioned institutions, even many Directorate-Generals of the Foreign Affairs Ministry became fundamental ¹⁰²: specifically, the DG for Country Promotion managed to obtain the necessary authorization from local authorities, as well as to practically organize several flights operated by the flag-carriers, national airlines such as Ita, that is part of jurisdiction of the DG for Country Promotion.

The flight from Wuhan was just the first, as afterwards the Crisis Unit started to operate more and more flights in every part of the world, with the assistance of the Italian embassies and consular offices, in order to bring back Italian citizens that have been stuck in foreign countries. The modus operandi was the same adopted in the case of the Wuhan flight: cooperation with different State's administrations, interlocution with the various institutions of the diplomatic network, assessment of the needs of Italian community in

¹⁰² Hearing of the Head of the Crisis Unit Amb. Stefano Verrecchia at the Commission for Foreign and Community Affairs of the Italian Deputies Chamber on 10th June 2020 (source https://www.esteri.it/it/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/eventi/2020/06/camera-audizione-del-capo-dell-unita-di-crisi-verrecchia/)

the world, organization of flights in conjunction with the above-mentioned organisms, and get into contacts with Italian people stuck in foreign countries.

On 17th March 2020, in the middle of Covid outbreak, the Italian Ministry published a note on the state of repatriation of Italian citizens from other countries, testifying what has been sustained so far, that there is a clear procedure to follow when managing crises, involving cooperation with diplomatic network and other institutions of the State, as well as the coordination with other institutional bodies. Further, the note enlightened that the Crisis Unit, during such an emergency, was deeply overwhelmed in handling the requests from Italian citizens all over the world.

“The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is at the forefront of support for Italians abroad, through the Crisis Unit, Italian Embassies and Consulates around the world. It is working to identify, in constant liaison with the Authorities of foreign countries, means and itineraries for the repatriation of all those who wish to return. The entire diplomatic-consular network is working tirelessly to disseminate useful information to compatriots and facilitate their return.

Since the beginning of covid-19 crisis, more than 90 flights have been organized, including flights in derogation of the ordinary schedule or other types of connections, which have allowed more than 8000 compatriots from 14 countries to return home. The Crisis Unit answered more than 45,000 calls and continues to receive more than 1,500 e-mails every day. Added to this are the thousands of requests for assistance that are received without interruption by the consular task forces set up in the countries where the presence of compatriots wishing to return to Italy is greatest.”¹⁰³

In the image below¹⁰⁴, it is highlighted the intervention of the Crisis Unit in every country of the world: in yellow the countries where the Unit organized flights in derogation of the regular schedule, whereas in beige the countries where the Unit set up direct interventions on the field for assisting compatriots, and in green the Consular Task Forces.

¹⁰³ Foreign Affairs Ministry Note, *Activities for the Return of Compatriots* (17th March 2020) (source https://www.esteri.it/it/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/comunicati/2020/03/nota-farnesina-attivita-maeci-per-il-rientro-dei-connazionali/)

¹⁰⁴ Ibidem

It has been recorded¹⁰⁵ that, until the 17th March 2020, the activities carried out by the Crisis Unit in helping Italian citizens have involved more than 180 countries, with a total of 123 flights operated in derogation to ordinary schedule, rescuing the lives of more than 8000 Italian citizens.

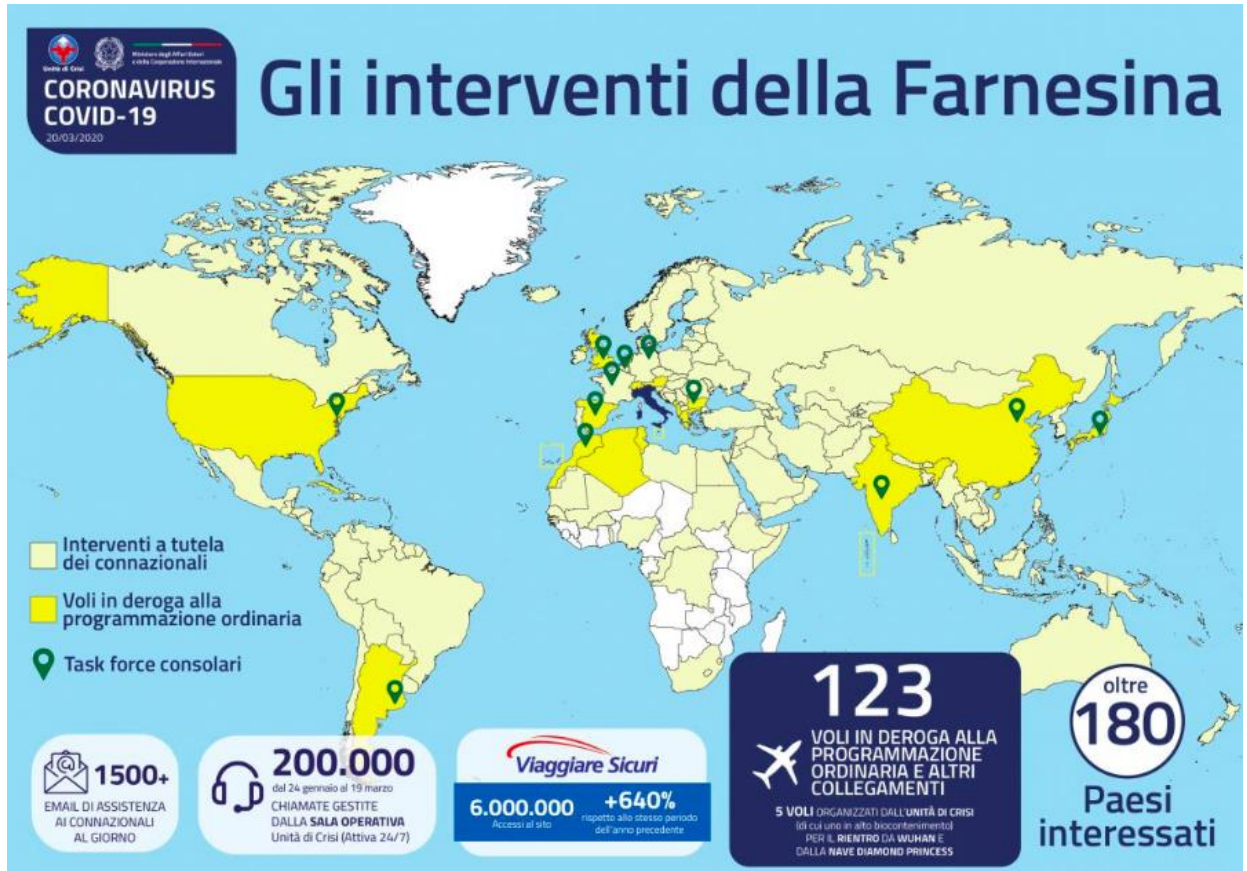


Figure 20: MAECI Operations during Covid crisis (MAECI Note March 2020)

In 2020, there were approximately 5 million people with Italian passports registered to AIRE (Anagrafe Italiani Residenti all'Estero, the registry office of citizens abroad), in addition to them the ones who are not registered because temporary abroad for work, study, or holidays. In setting up special flights to bring them all back, the Crisis Unit gave priority to those who are not resident abroad, since those who are resident have paid for years taxes abroad, legitimately sustaining the health system of other countries¹⁰⁶.

¹⁰⁵ Ibidem

¹⁰⁶ Information acquired during the conversation between the author and the permanent staff of the Crisis Unit (that took place the 5th January 2023)

Priority was given to students, tourists, and all the others that are not resident abroad, although little by little everyone willing to get back has been repatriated.

The modus operandi of the Crisis Unit during the Covid-19 crisis, as expressed in the present thesis, is based on the empirical research of the author, that had the opportunity to acquire an in-depth awareness through visiting the Crisis Unit. Also, the procedure that the Unit followed in tackling the pandemic is documented by the various official documents published on the website of the Foreign Affairs Ministry.

As pointed out by the former Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Emanuela Del Re, “since the start of the Coronavirus emergency, more than 30,000 compatriots have already returned to Italy from over 30 different countries and repatriation operations continue, with flights bringing many compatriots back to Italy from Asia, Latin America and the United States. Our consular representations started a 'census' of Italians present in the countries of their accreditation a few weeks ago, but the lists are constantly being updated and change by the hour. At the beginning of the pandemic, there were tens of thousands of people who were temporarily abroad for study, work or tourism and who were not registered with AIRE. More than 30,000 compatriots have already returned from over 30 countries with flights, ships and other means of transport provided by private companies thanks to the diplomatic action of the Foreign Affairs Ministry and our Embassies. It is impossible to know who is abroad temporarily and where, if they have not reported it. That is why the Crisis Unit works on the basis of reports that arrive. The Crisis Unit's operations room has been reinforced and is operational 24 hours a day, 7 days a week”¹⁰⁷. And again, important for our analysis of crisis management in the case-study of Covid-19: “repatriation operations are still ongoing and are not stopping. Our network perceives the requests arriving from the various countries and the Ministry consults the airlines to organize flights that leave empty and bring the compatriots back to Italy. Other flights are already planned for the return of compatriots from south-east Asia, Latin America, and the United States, and planes continue to land daily from the main European capitals that

¹⁰⁷ Interview to former Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs E. Del Re, *30,000 Italians already repatriated due to Coronavirus emergency*, FanPage (31st March 2020) (source https://www.esteri.it/it/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/interviste/2020/03/1a-viceministra-del-re-a-fanpage-it-per-emergenza-coronavirus-rimpatriati-gia-30mila-italiani/)

not only repatriate our compatriots who were in London, Paris, Frankfurt, Munich, and Brussels, but also act as hubs and stopover airports for those coming from other continents from which it is possible to return, if conditions permit, with combinations of flights operated by foreign companies”¹⁰⁸.

Finally, I would like to conclude with a remarkable note of the former Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation L. Di Maio, that underlined the tireless work performed by diplomats and members of the Crisis Unit in managing Covid-19 crisis.

“The Foreign Affairs Ministry, with its women and men of the diplomatic corps, together with our intelligence agencies, will continue to search the world for the material we need. There are consuls and ambassadors who are now using their knowledge and personal reputations to source fans and masks, in the most unthinkable countries. Some of them have rented warehouses, buy the material on parole, store it with the help of the embassies' own staff, supervise loading/unloading on cargo flights and go to sleep - a few hours - only after the flight has touched down in Italy.

Every day, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and my closest collaborators call dozens of our ambassadors around the world to sound out whether there is any new aid. These people are going beyond their duties and responsibilities, securing contracts and operations often only with their word and the finances of their embassy. True, we are all called upon to do our utmost. And indeed these people, like so many other servants of the state right now, are doing so”¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰⁸ Ibidem

¹⁰⁹ Message of the Minister L. Di Maio to the Diplomatic Network on 21st March 2020 (source https://www.esteri.it/it/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/retediplomatica/2020/03/messaggio-del-ministro-di-maio/)

Conclusion

The present research has taken into consideration the Crisis Unit of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, demonstrating its responsiveness and efficacy in situations of crisis.

As discussed in the first chapter, Italy is an active member of the international community, representing a key-actor with respect to the main geopolitical scenarios in which is involved. Indeed, Italian foreign policy is articulated along four main dimensions (European, Mediterranean, North-Atlantic, and International) ¹¹⁰, whereby the Foreign Affairs Ministry enforces national interests. In the last years, Italy has occupied a prominent role at international level, exercising the presidency of the G20 in 2021, the partnership with UK for Cop26, along with the possibility for Rome to host Expo2030. As highlighted in the present research, diplomacy is a powerful tool for enhancing Italian involvement on international scale, and for protecting the State's interests around the world: diplomacy is the driving force of foreign policy. Accordingly, the 2022 Global Soft Power Index ¹¹¹ places Italy at the 10th position of countries with the highest capacity of influencing other nations without resorting to economic or military coercion, identifying it as a major soft power actor at international level.

The second chapter deals with the main geopolitical scenarios where Crisis Unit operates, in conjunction with other State's administrations: the Unit has the task of monitoring the geopolitical scenarios around the world, assessing the capacity of its structure to responsively face the main threats, and advising citizens on the main risks that derive from such situations of crises¹¹². Within this framework, the research has focused the analysis on a case-study, in order to show the efficacy of the Crisis Unit in managing situations of crisis: Covid-19 pandemic, that constituted a multiplier of emergencies both

¹¹⁰ F. Coticchia, A. Ruggeri, *An International Peacekeeper. The Evolution of Italian Foreign and Defence Policy*, ISPI Publications & Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (2022) (source <https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaip2206.pdf>)

¹¹¹ <https://brandirectory.com/softpower/>

¹¹² <https://www.viaggiasesicuri.it/home>

at regional and global level. With this regard, the third chapter also analyses the geopolitical relations that have involved Italy during the pandemic: since it was the first European country affected by the virus¹¹³, many States decided to close their frontiers, and the risk of isolation was concrete¹¹⁴, perhaps leading to catastrophic geopolitical implications. However, the key-assumption of the research is that, in order to tackle the fragmentation of the international community, cooperation and diplomacy are necessary for the maintenance of peace and international security, because the gap between the surplus of multilateral challenges and the deficit of multilateral solutions is increasing¹¹⁵. As clearly highlighted, diplomacy played a key role in ensuring sanitary equipment from all over the world, as well as to coordinate the repatriation of thousands of Italian citizens. In fact, the main emergency the Crisis Unit had to manage, regarded those citizens that were not able to return to their country due to the imminent closure of borders. Since the Unit is specifically charged with the protection of Italian citizens abroad, especially in the context of emergency, during Covid-19 crisis nearly 107,000 people from 121 countries have been rescued thanks to the work of the Unit, through 1,125 operations by air, land and sea¹¹⁶.

The present research has provided an empirical analysis of the operativity of the Crisis Unit, proving that diplomacy and cooperation are fundamental not only for crisis management, but also for the preservation of international security.

¹¹³ Ministry of Health www.salute.gov.it

¹¹⁴ Interview to the former Foreign Affairs Minister, *Corriere della Sera* (25th February 2020) (source https://www.esteri.it/it/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/interviste/2020/02/di-maio-noi-trasparenti-con-gli-altri-stati-nuove-misure-contro-il-contagio/)

¹¹⁵ UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, during the 75th anniversary of the San Francisco Conference (21st September 2020)

¹¹⁶ Foreign Affairs Ministry Note (2nd July 2020) (source https://www.esteri.it/it/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/comunicati/2020/07/prosegue-il-lavoro-della-farnesina-583-rimpatriati-oggi-totale-sale-a-107-200/)

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Executive Summary

The present research is aimed at analysing the Crisis Unit of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, focusing on its action in context of crises. The methodology adopted is analytical: which are the geopolitical implications that arise from crises? The Crisis Unit operates within this framework, in conjunction with other State's administrations: its main task is the protection of Italian citizens in foreign countries.

The intention of the author is to demonstrate the responsiveness of the Unit in managing crises. The sources are based on official documents and, specifically in the case-study presented, on information acquired through direct interactions with the permanent staff of the Crisis Unit, that has allowed to acquire an in-depth knowledge of the capacities of the Unit in terms of emergency management. For this purpose, statistical data and practical cases will be presented in order to highlight the efficacy of the operations carried out by the Crisis Unit.

The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation represents the projection of the State at international level: as such, it is charged with enacting the foreign policy of the government of the Italian Republic ¹¹⁷. Its functions concern Italy's political, economic, cultural and social bonds with foreign institutions (countries and international organizations): the Ministry has the task of representing the State and enforcing national interests on an international scale.

The foreign policy of Italy, in conformity with its history and in accomplishment to its international commitments, is articulated along four main dimensions ¹¹⁸ : European

¹¹⁷ S. Baldi, *Ministero degli Affari Esteri Guida alla Farnesina*, DGRI Istituto Diplomatico, ISDI Press, 2012

¹¹⁸ F. Coticchia, A. Ruggeri, *An International Peacekeeper. The Evolution of Italian Foreign and Defence Policy*, ISPI Publications & Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (2022) (link <https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaip2206.pdf>)

dimension, with regard to the EU integration process, whereby Italy has been a founding member from the establishment of the ECSC (European Coal and Steel Community) in 1951; Mediterranean dimension, that from a geopolitical perspective represents one of the main priorities of the Italian State in foreign policy ¹¹⁹ ; North-Atlantic dimension, that initially, in the wake of World War II, was conceived as a defensive military alliance; International dimension, since Italy is an active member of the international community, seeking to cooperate with different countries in many issues areas (such as trade and energy, most of all). Each of this dimension has a specific system of interstate relations, in a delicate balance of power within the international order, according to which States cooperate with each other, trying to resolve interstate disputes with diplomacy, in the name of common good, rather than with military aggression: international cooperation is a cornerstone of Italian foreign policy, an indispensable tool both for strengthening national interests and for maintaining international security.

Within the international arena, much of the global governance is exercised through diplomacy, the lifeblood of foreign policy, the essential instrument that lies at the core of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. Diplomacy, that in most cases is silent due to the confidential nature of many of its activities, work for the benefit of everyone, in the name of the common good, with a view on the international order as a system based on democratic principles and human rights protection ¹²⁰: as such, diplomacy is a valuable tool for the State to safeguard its interests all around the world. Today, the operating system of the institutions through which global governance is exercised has never been so close to the brink. In fact, the atrocities committed in the last century suggested that international cooperation was a primary necessity, in order to overcome disagreements between States and impose peace and stability in the global governance: cooperation in all possible issue areas seemed to be the solution for the maintenance of international security¹²¹, after the brutalities of the two World Wars;

¹¹⁹ A. Berti, *Re-Discovering Italy's Mediterranean Vocation*, IAI Commentaries (2021) (link <https://www.iai.it/it/pubblicazioni/re-discovering-italys-mediterranean-vocation>)

¹²⁰ S. Baldi, G. Nesi (a cura di), *Diplomatici. 33 saggi su aspetti giuridici e politici della diplomazia contemporanea*, Università degli Studi di Trento (2018)

¹²¹ Klabbers J., *Advanced Introduction to the Law of International Organizations*, Edward Elgar Publishing (2015)

international cooperation has had the effect of reducing the chances for States to resolve disputes through violence, but rather in the name of common interests, through diplomacy. Actually, since the Westphalia Peace in 1648, when the modern international system was conceived, Henry Kissinger defines a global order “where nation-States comply with rules and common norms, that embrace liberal economic systems, that renounce to territorial gains, that respect national sovereignty, and that adopt participatory and democratic systems of government”¹²². Instead, today, the war in Ukraine has brought back, in the European territory, the primitive principle of resort to violence and military aggression as instruments to regulate disputes among States, roughly subverting the international order and producing dramatic geopolitical consequences. The key-assumption of the research is that, in order to tackle the fragmentation of the international community, cooperation and diplomacy are necessary for the maintenance of peace and international security, because the gap between the surplus of multilateral challenges and the deficit of multilateral solutions is increasing¹²³. In order to demonstrate such hypothesis, the third chapter will analyze the case-study of Covid-19 crisis, and how the Crisis Unit managed to resolve the emergency, through the relentless work of diplomats all around the world and in the name of international cooperation.

Under art. 117 of the Italian Constitution¹²⁴, the State has exclusive legislative powers in regulating the foreign policy and international relations of the State within the international arena, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, that is the one entitled to project Italian politics in the world and to protect its interests abroad. Before digging into the object of the research, namely the Crisis Unit of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, it's necessary to briefly focus the attention on the

¹²² Kissinger H., *Global Order*, Penguin Books (2014)

¹²³ UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, during the 75th anniversary of the San Francisco Conference (21st September 2020)

¹²⁴ Art. 117 It. Const. (1948): “legislative powers shall be vested in the State and the Regions in compliance with the Constitution and with the constraints deriving from EU legislation and international obligations. The State has exclusive legislative powers in the following matters: (a) foreign policy and international relations of the State; relations between the State and the European Union; right of asylum and legal status of non-EU citizens [...]”

organization of the Ministry, in order to understand the architecture in which the Unit operates. The two leading figures of the Ministry are, respectively, the Minister, who represents the highest political authority, and the Secretary General, who instead represents the highest administrative authority. In addition, it is structured into nine Directorates-General (DGs), each of them with different duties and objectives ¹²⁵; also, the General Inspectorate and the Diplomatic Protocol pertain to specific functions that contribute to the well-functioning of the day-to-day business of the Ministry.

The objectives of the Italian Ministry are pursued around a solid diplomatic network, which is made up of effective institutions that fairly represent the country abroad: namely, embassies, consulates, permanent representations to the international organizations (or permanent missions as in the case of the UN), and cultural institutes. These institutions constitute the further expression of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, its manifestation abroad ¹²⁶, whose purposes are to represent the country and to protect Italian interests at international level; the differences among the institutions that constitute the diplomatic network are several:

- Embassies are the official diplomatic representations of the State: they are located in the capital cities of the foreign state, their primary task is to engage in diplomatic relations with the hosting nation, and, as laid down in the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961, premises of an embassy enjoy legal immunity from national rules of the hosting state and extraterritorial status from the sending state as sovereign territory ¹²⁷.
- Consulates, instead, are subordinated to embassies: consular offices are not necessarily in the capital city¹²⁸, due to the fact that they have administrative

¹²⁵ DG for Political Affairs and Security, DG for Human Resources, Budget and Innovation, DG for Global Affairs, DG for European Union, DG for Country Promotion, DG for Italian Citizens Abroad and Migration Policies, DG for Development Cooperation, DG for Public and Cultural Diplomacy, DG for Management and ICT

¹²⁶ Official website of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation www.esteri.it

¹²⁷ Art. 22 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961): “1. The premises of the mission shall be inviolable. The agents of the receiving State may not enter them, except with the consent of the head of the mission.”

¹²⁸ www.esteri.it

duties; under the coordination of embassies, consulates assist the national community and enforce political, economic, cultural relations with the territories of competence.

- Permanent Representations to International Organizations (IOs) are diplomatic missions that a state, that is a member to an international organization, institutes at the headquarter of the IO, with the aim to keep lasting and fruitful relationships with the member states of the IO; their role is to strengthen relationships with the member states of the IO, to participate in the activity of the organization, such as to vote in the cases of a plenary organ, and to uphold the interests of the state within the international arena¹²⁹.
- Italian Cultural Institutes are further manifestations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs abroad: their key-difference lies in the cultural feature of its competences; indeed, the institutes' object is to foster cultural relations with the hosting nation.

The Foreign Affairs Ministry shapes the foreign policy through and by virtue of the diplomatic network. In addition, the Crisis Unit communicates with every organisms of the diplomatic network: whenever some key-information are needed, there is a constant and efficient dialogue among institutions. Embassies and consulates actively interact with the Crisis Unit especially in times of emergency, for example when an Italian citizen has been imprisoned¹³⁰: in this case, the responsiveness of crisis management depends on the dialogue between the Crisis Unit and the Italian embassy of the country where the citizen has been imprisoned. According to the 2022 Statistical Yearbook drafted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation¹³¹, the diplomatic network can rely on 305 offices abroad (that comprehend the totality of the four institutions mentioned above): 27% in the EU, 22% in America, 17% in Asia, 11% in the MENA region, 13% in the extra EU countries, and the remaining 10% in sub-Saharan Africa¹³²; all over the world,

¹²⁹ www.esteri.it

¹³⁰ Information acquired during the conversation between the author and the permanent staff of the Crisis Unit (that took place the 5th January 2023)

¹³¹ Statistical Yearbook, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (2022)

¹³² Ibidem

there are 129 Italian Embassies, 8 Permanent Representations, 83 Consular Offices and 83 Cultural Institutes¹³³.

The Crisis Unit is an essential component of the architecture of the Ministry in the achievement of its tasks: it is at the direct dependences of the Secretary General, responding to specific needs of the evolving society, due to new risks and threats which, along with the increasing of travels around the world, have completely changed the landscape of international security, leading to stronger demands for assistance, prevention and information measures¹³⁴.

The mission of the Crisis Unit is the protection of Italian citizens abroad in situations of emergency. To carry out its duties, the Unit is a responsive and flexible structure, it is active 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, it's composed of nearly 30 people who are both diplomats and administrative officers. Furthermore, a sophisticated system of technology allows the Unit to promptly respond to any emergency that may occur¹³⁵. The Unit faces two kinds of crises¹³⁶: natural disasters, and induced disasters; natural disasters result from unpredictable events, like earthquakes, pandemics, or floods; on the contrary, induced catastrophes result from intentional actions: terrorism, military invasion, threats to national security¹³⁷. Consequently,

the main fields of operation of the Crisis Unit are international terrorism, socio-political tensions, natural disasters, pandemics, health catastrophes. In recent decades, crisis situations have changed, acquiring an increasingly global character: for this reason, the Crisis Unit attributes great importance to prevention strategies and to the study of possible threats for the Italian community around the world. With this respect, the Crisis Unit has developed a detailed database of the Italian presence around the world, creating a complex system which elaborate data coming from different sources in order to deliver two services of prevention strategy, namely DoveSiamoNelMondo and ViaggiareSicuri, two

¹³³ Ibidem

¹³⁴ https://www.esteri.it/it/unita_crisi/

¹³⁵ Information acquired during the conversation between the author and the permanent staff of the Crisis Unit (that took place the 5th January 2023)

¹³⁶ Interview to the former Head of the Crisis Unit Amb. Stefano Verrecchia (source https://www.esteri.it/mae/resource/pubblicazioni/2019/10/newsletter_7-2019.pdf)

¹³⁷ Ibidem

websites that monitor the possible threats around the world and provide information on the countries of destination for those willing to travel abroad. In addition, the Crisis Unit App allows citizens to voluntarily report their presence in a foreign country, thus guaranteeing greater speed and efficiency to the Crisis Unit in planning hypothetical rescue operations, especially in those countries at risk.

Finally, the third chapter deals with the case-study of how the Crisis Unit managed the crisis relating to Covid-19 pandemic, providing an empirical analysis of crisis management operated by the Crisis Unit, through empirical information acquired during the interlocution with the staff of the Unit. Covid-19 pandemic sparked a series of catastrophes around the world: from a geopolitical perspective, Covid acted as a multiplier of crises all over the world, both at regional and global level. Global crises break up the balance of international order, resulting in catastrophic geopolitical implications: the recovery from Covid-19, a global crisis, plays a key-role in determining the future geopolitical landscape ¹³⁸.

In context of crisis, whenever a warning notification reaches the operations room of the Crisis Unit, usually the modus operandi of the Unit follows the sequent steps ¹³⁹:

- First of all, it's important to rapidly understand the kind of notification (missing of an Italian citizen abroad, imprisonment, or health emergency as in the case-study under analysis);
- Information gathering of every details concerning the emergency, through the interlocution with other State's organs and with the other institutions of the diplomatic network: usually, the embassy in question where the crisis is taking place is one of the first organ that mobilizes every resources in order to acquire the highest amount of information relating to the emergency in question;
- Contact the institutional bodies that represent the administrative and political authorities, above all the Minister and the Secretary General, in order to receive more indication on the direction to follow;

¹³⁸ S. Brannen, *Four Scenarios for Geopolitical Order in 2025-2030: What Will Great Power Competition Look Like?*, Center for Strategic & International Studies (2020) (link <https://www.csis.org/analysis/four-scenarios-geopolitical-order-2025-2030-what-will-great-power-competition-look>)

¹³⁹ Information acquired during the conversation between the author and the permanent staff of the Crisis Unit (that took place the 5th January 2023)

- Get in touch with the relatives of the persons involved in the crisis abroad, trying to transmit to them a sense of sympathy and proficiency as representatives of the State.

In the case-study presented, the Crisis Unit was deeply involved when the Covid crisis broke out, since it had to cope with the requests of thousands of citizens that were abroad for a variety of reasons (business, study, work, holiday) but were not able to repatriate. In fact, due to the closure of frontiers in nearly all countries of the world, Italian citizens were not allowed to return to their home-country, not only because many flights were cancelled, but also because countries denied to many airline companies the legal authorization to fly to Italy. Consequently, the Crisis Unit had to get in touch with people stuck in foreign states, mainly through Italian embassies and consular offices: every organ of the diplomatic network took on a necessary role in allowing a fruitful and prompt interlocution, acting as intermediary body between the Crisis Unit and the citizens abroad. Basically, the embassies had to verify the sanitary conditions of the Italian community within their hosting country, in order to assess their main needs and to communicate them to the Foreign Affairs Ministry. The Crisis Unit, as the organ in charged of the protection of Italian citizens abroad, was responsible for the coordination of the whole operation of rescue, resulting in a successful operation of synergy between the different institutions of the State.

On 29th January 2020, the Crisis Unit organized the first flight from Wuhan for Italian citizens that were locked in China without the possibility of repatriate¹⁴⁰ (the day after, Italian government decided to close the borders with China, suspending all the flights to and from China). The operation was carried out in strict conjunction with the Ministry of Defense¹⁴¹ (since it was a military airplane that carried away from Wuhan Italian

¹⁴⁰ Foreign Affairs Ministry Note, *Crisis Unit organizes flight to repatriate Italian citizens from Wuhan* (29th January 2020) (source https://www.esteri.it/it/sala_stamp/archivionotizie/comunicati/2020/01/unita-di-crisi-organizza-volo-per-rimpatriare-cittadini-italiani-da-wuhan/)

¹⁴¹ Specifically, the Interforce Summit Operations Command (COVI, Comando Operativo di Vertice Interforze), a body directly subordinated to the Chief of Defense Staff (Capo di Stato Maggiore della Difesa) with the purpose of facilitating command in operations in the five domains (land, sea, sky, space and cybernetic), for ensuring the coordination of military operations; it usually acts in the context of high-level emergencies.

passengers), the Ministry of Health (with respect to the sanitary measures adopted in order to prevent those who were in Wuhan to affect other persons), and the National Institute for Infectious Diseases “Lazzaro Spallanzani” (due to the presence, on the flight, of specialized medical staff). The repatriation of Italian citizens from Wuhan was an operation of combined efforts and coaction coordinated by the Crisis Unit. Since then, the Unit acquired a clear *modus operandi* in managing the operations of rescue: cooperation with different State’s administrations, interlocution with the various institutions of the diplomatic network, assessment of the needs of Italian community in the world, organization of flights in conjunction with the above-mentioned organisms. Another aspect of the whole operation was that the Unit, as representative of the Italian State, could obtain from national authorities the normative authorizations that instead have been denied to many airline companies due to the closure of frontiers. Specifically, the Foreign Affairs Ministry DG for Country Promotion managed to obtain the necessary authorization from local authorities¹⁴², as well as to practically organize several flights operated by the so-called flag-carriers (national airlines such as Ita, that is part of jurisdiction of the DG for Country Promotion). The synergy between the different institutions of the State was fundamental in resolving the crisis and rescuing lives. Since the first flight from Wuhan, in only five months, the Crisis Unit repatriated more than 107,000 people from 121 countries, through 1,125 operations by air, land and sea¹⁴³. Furthermore, the second crisis that stemmed from Covid-19 pandemic regarded the risk of isolation for Italy at international level, possibly leading to devastating geopolitical effects. Since Italy was the first European country hit by Covid-19 at the end of February 2020¹⁴⁴, the reaction of the international community was initially skeptical, of closure: as with China, States started to close their frontiers with Italy. The evidence of the isolation

¹⁴² Hearing of the former Head of the Crisis Unit Amb. Stefano Verrecchia at the Commission for Foreign and Community Affairs of the Italian Deputies Chamber on 10th June 2020 (source https://www.esteri.it/it/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/eventi/2020/06/camera-audizione-del-capo-dell-unita-di-crisi-verrecchia/)

¹⁴³ Foreign Affairs Ministry Note (2nd July 2020) (source https://www.esteri.it/it/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/comunicati/2020/07/prosegue-il-lavoro-della-farnesina-583-rimpatriati-oggi-totale-sale-a-107-200/)

¹⁴⁴ Ministry of Health www.salute.gov.it

risk is verified by the numerous Notes published by the Foreign Affairs Ministry, with regards to the limitations to persons and goods at the frontiers imposed by the local authorities of Switzerland¹⁴⁵ and Slovenia¹⁴⁶, that wanted to prevent the virus to affect their countries. The former Minister of Foreign Affairs, in different interviews with national and foreign press¹⁴⁷, attempted to vehiculate a sense of accountability of Italian institutions, trying to rebuild the trust towards Italy as a responsible actor of the international community, capable of reasonably handling the sanitary emergency. Reputation building is actually one of the most important tools in crisis management¹⁴⁸. The intention was to push foreign countries to promptly react as a whole to this emergency: the Minister appealed to the international community, asking to return to international cooperation as an instrument for avoiding interstate disputes, as a need in order to overcome this unprecedented situation as a whole united community. Cooperation was necessary with the aim of guaranteeing the health-care equipment that was needed for preventing the transmission of infective disease (the so-called PPE, personal protective equipment, such as masks, gloves, foot and eye protection, respirators, face shields, full body suits). In fact, the Foreign Affairs Ministry actively mobilize for the supply of sanitary equipment, so that healthcare workers and civil society could have a sort of shield against the virus, as fundamental tools to face the crisis. Consequently, the Ministry, since the emergency broke out, has searched for masks and sanitary facilities all over the world, trying to push countries to cooperate and to work altogether for the common good. In other words, international cooperation served for the common good, proving a valuable element in fronting a sanitary emergency. Indeed, at the end of March, when it was generally recognized that Italy was only the first European

¹⁴⁵ Foreign Affairs Minsitry Note on Switzerland (13th March 2020) (source https://www.esteri.it/it/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/comunicati/2020/03/scalfarotto-colloquio-con-svizzera-su-situazione-frontalieri/)

¹⁴⁶ Foreign Affairs Ministry Note on Slovenia (13 March 2020) (source https://www.esteri.it/it/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/comunicati/2020/03/nota-farnesina-slovenia/)

¹⁴⁷ Interview to Foreign Affairs Minister, *BBC* (13th March 2020) (source https://www.esteri.it/it/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/interviste/2020/03/coronavirus-italy-says-1-000-have-died-but-lockdown-can-work/)

¹⁴⁸ T. Coombs, S. J. Holladay, *The Handbook of Crisis Communication*, Willy-Blackwell (2009)

country where the virus spread, since it affected mostly every region of the world, during such time of extreme emergency, diplomacy played a key-role in ensuring national security. Italian State relied upon the diplomatic network to obtain sufficient health equipment for fronting the sanitary crisis; ambassadors and consuls had to engage in constant interlocution with the Crisis Unit on the one hand, in order to transmit the needs of Italian citizens abroad, and, on the other hand, with foreign institutions of the hosting countries for seeking sanitary facilities and establishing multilateral relations for helping Italy to recover from Covid-19 crisis.

Diplomacy played a key role in ensuring sanitary equipment from all over the world, as well as to coordinate the repatriation of thousands of Italian citizens. Consequently, through the case-study presented, the key-assumption of the research has been verified: in order to tackle the fragmentation of the international community, especially in times of emergency, cooperation and diplomacy are necessary for the maintenance of peace and international security, because the gap between the surplus of multilateral challenges and the deficit of multilateral solutions is increasing ¹⁴⁹. The Crisis Unit, with this respect, acted with efficiency and responsiveness: it succeeded in resolving the toughest crisis the international order has ever experienced since World War II, relying upon an operational apparatus that has made diplomacy and international cooperation fundamental tools in achieving results, especially in situations of emergency.

Finally, the two images below display, respectively, (1) the main activities of assistance and protection to Italian citizens abroad, carried out by the Foreign Affairs Ministry along with the Crisis Unit, and (2) the main global geopolitical threats underlined by *Viaggiare Sicuri*, one of the main services delivered by the Crisis Unit in matter of prevention strategies.

¹⁴⁹ UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, during the 75th anniversary of the San Francisco Conference (21st September 2020)

	2019	2020	2021
A) interventi di protezione consolare coordinati dalla DGIT			
Interventi di tutela dei cittadini italiani all'estero	44.552	119.115	77.377
Interventi di tutela dei cittadini europei non rappresentati nei Paesi extra UE	19	88	13
Rimpatri di salme di connazionali deceduti all'estero	1.336	1.259	1.158
Rimpatri sanitari	83	95	64
Ricerche connazionali scomparsi	1.087	579	460
Totale A)	47.077	121.136	79.072
"Dove Siamo nel Mondo"			
Viaggi registrati	839.455	322.788	155.766
Missioni di protezione delle Rappresentanze diplomatiche e degli Uffici consolari a rischio			
Missioni affidate ai militari dell'Arma dei Carabinieri	521	463	501
B) interventi coordinati dall'Unità di crisi in contesti di rischio			
Allarmi sanitari	58	30.000	5
Attentati	53	22	22
Atti di pirateria	1	-	-
Decessi di connazionali	8	-	1
Dirottamenti aerei	-	-	-
Disastri e calamità naturali	100	35	58
Evacuazioni	-	-	-
Incidenti aerei e navali	24	8	8
Missioni e Joint Survery Teams	16	-	-
Rimpatri salme	8	-	8
Rimpatri sanitari	1	2	8
Sequestri di connazionali	6	6	-
Teleconferenze e videoconferenze	68	223	136
Tensioni socio-politiche	219	69	125
Totale B)	562	30.365	371

Fonte: DGIT - ISPE - Unità di crisi

Figure 21: Crisis Unit activities of assistance and protection (Statistical Yearbook MAECI 2022)



Figure 22: Global geopolitical risks (www.viaggiasesicuri.it 2023)