

## Abstract

**Foreign Affairs Policy of Bettino Craxi in the Mediterranean**

The foreign affairs policy of Bettino Craxi in the Mediterranean goes from his years as secretary of the Italian Socialist Party to his years as Prime Minister of Italy. Craxi was elected secretary of the Italian Socialist Party in 1976; even though the strong majority of the Party saw his election as temporary he was secretary of the Party until 1993. Craxi immediately devoted himself to give his secretary a strong foreign policy, of which he was also responsible as vice-secretary, that could also influence the foreign policy of the Italian government. The foreign policy of the Socialist Party of Craxi was a dynamic and ambitious foreign policy, above all a policy that looked to the South with the aim of making the Mediterranean a sea of peace, consolidating the function of Italy as a bridge between Europe, the Arab world and Africa. In Italy the recrudescence of the Cold War found on opposite sides communists and socialists. While Enrico Berlinguer, secretary of the Italian Communist Party, meant the membership of his party to a system of satellites parties referring to the Soviet Empire as a way to achieve the communist ideals, to Bettino Craxi, belonging to the Atlantic alliance was a statement of an identity for Italian socialists. The development of the Italian Socialist Party foreign policy under the secretary of Craxi was closely linked to the controversy with Euro communism and condemnation of Soviet policy.

In the late 70s the debate between the Italian Socialist Party and the Communist Socialist Party was centered on the topics of the Cold War. After the death of Aldo Moro, President of the Christian Democracy, in 1978, Enrico Berlinguer, Secretary of the Communist Party, claimed the “rich lesson of Lenin” in the newspapers. Craxi answered to this statement with an essay of Proudhon in which was stated that “communism and pluralism are two antithetic words”, openly claiming his Western views opposite to the Soviet views of Berlinguer. The debate between the two left parties was aggravated by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The Italian Socialist Party viewed the invasion as an imperialist action of neostalinism. The only convergence in the foreign policy of the

parties was the support to Palestine and to the PLO of Arafat. However, this was secondary to the topics of the cold war. In 1976 the decision of the USSR to install SS-20 missile pointing Western Europe once again exacerbated the conflict between the two parties. Craxi decided to pick up the appeal of Helmut Schmidt, Prime Minister of the German Federal Republic, to the Western nations to respond to the USSR with adequate measures. During a NATO meeting in the Island of Guadalupe, France, the United Kingdom and the German Federal Republic asked the members states to draw up missiles in Western Europe able to respond to the SS-20. In 1979 the votes of the Italian Socialist Party in favor of the draw up of the missiles in Europe, during the voting session of the Chamber of Deputies, permitted the approval. While the Italian Communist Party of Berlinguer decided to oppose the draw up and participate to the protests against the missiles financed by the Soviet Union.

Craxi, during his years of secretary, also offered a great support to the socialist in the Mediterranean that fought for the freedom of their countries: Spanish, Portuguese and Greeks. In the headquarters of the Italian Socialist Party, for some time, Felipe Gonzales, Mario Suarez and Alexis Panagulis, all in exile, had an office and a modest salary. Later on, when Craxi became Prime Minister, he supported the Spanish and Portuguese entrance in the European Union. In the same years the Socialist Party entered in contrast with the French socialist and Mitterrand, for their support to the Algerian independent cause. The Italian socialist gave their support to the National Liberation Front of Ben Bella.

Craxi believed that as the US lifted up Europe with Marshall Plan in the post-war years, the rich nations of Europe should help the developing countries in order to have more equilibrium in the world. This is why Italian socialists insisted that Italy destined the 0,70% of its GDP to poor countries, adhering to the UN request. He believed that the rich countries which invested in poor countries would guarantee for them spheres of influence and markets, the third-world projects could give jobs to the countries' industries and the helped population would always be grateful to those who helped them in harsh times. For Craxi the Mediterranean could offer this kind of opportunities to Italy. This project requested to establish peace in the Mediterranean, in particular in the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Craxi believed that the only way to stop the conflict was the continuous persevering negotiation between the two counterparts. He affirmed the right of Israel to exist and live inside safe and recognized frontiers, but also its duty to withdraw from the territories occupied in the war of 1967. Craxi was actively involved in convincing Arafat,

leader of the PLO, to leave the armed struggle. Once the Palestinian leader gave his consent, Craxi was actively involved in convincing the US, Israel and the Arab States to start a dialogue with Arafat. The secretary of the Italian Socialist Party believed that the creation of a Jordanian-Palestinian delegation that could negotiate with Israel could be the beginning of peace in the Middle East. Unfortunately Craxi's project for the delegation wasn't accepted by Israel that decided not to trust Arafat. Nowadays Israel has to interface with Hamas and Hezbollah, two extremist terrorist movements born in the 1980s.

Bettino Craxi becomes Prime Minister of Italy in 1983 and lasted until 1987; his government was the 2<sup>nd</sup> most last longing of the "First Republic". During his years as Prime Minister the most significant act he undertook in the relations with Mediterranean were the decisions taken during the Sigonella crisis. In October 7<sup>th</sup> 1985 a group of four Palestinian terrorists seized the Italian cruise ship "Achille Lauro", holding the 545 passengers and crew hostage, and also killed one of them. On October 9<sup>th</sup> the hijackers agreed to abandon the ship and free the hostages in exchange for a safe conduct towards Tunisia aboard an Egyptian commercial airliner. The airplane was intercepted by Americans F14 aircrafts that directed the plane to land in Sicily, Italy, in the military base of Sigonella. Meanwhile President Ronald Reagan called Craxi to alert him that the plane with the four hijackers was landing in Italy and that he wanted to extradite the four terrorists to the US. Craxi responded to Reagan that this was not possible because the ship was Italian and the terrorists were landing on Italian soil, therefore the jurisdiction was Italian. Craxi assured Reagan that the terrorists would undergo a trial in Italy for what they have done. This phone call between the two leaders will remain famous in history. This episode didn't interfere or damage the relations between Italy and the US and in particular the profound and mutual esteem between Craxi and Reagan. This bond between the two leaders was seen later on in the 1986 Tokyo meeting of the G5; it was a while that Craxi was trying to extend the G5 to Italy, but he knew that he didn't have the support of France and the UK. During a visit in New York, before the G5 meeting, Craxi was able to meet Reagan and receive his support for the Italian entrance in the G5. So during the Tokyo meeting, with the support of Reagan, Craxi was able to achieve his goal and the G7, of which Italy was part of, was created.

Craxi knew how many Italian and European interests were linked to the Mediterranean, and he wanted to create a peaceful sea of commerce and trade, a point of encounter between different cultures. He imagined Italy as the bridge from Europe to the

new civilizations of North Africa and the Middle East. But he knew that there is no peace where people die of hunger and starvation. He knew how hard it was to earn a quarter of a point on the western markets and he saw in the emerging countries of the Mediterranean a suitable place for the development of Italian Industries and Southern Italy. There is always linearity and consistency in Craxi's foreign policy: it is almost natural that the energy spent to improve relations with the countries of the Mediterranean, and to put an end to that real cancer that was and is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, was continued in the last phase of his political activity, in the study and the drafting of a plan for the reduction of the debts of the Third World, carried out on behalf of the UN. Much of its Mediterranean policy action is dedicated to the Palestinian problem. Craxi was well aware that without peace in the Middle East that Mediterranean Sea would never be pacified. With his action Craxi obtained international respect for Italy and the Italians and the pursue of an independent foreign policy, neither marginal nor subordinate to any other state.