The Me Too Syndrome reloaded:
Change and continuity in Italian relations with France and Germany after Brexit

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Abstract

The 2016 United Kingdom European Union membership referendum altered the European balance of power, leaving France and Germany as the only major powers in the EU. As a would-be peer within EU institutions, Italy was particularly exposed by this situation and adapted its foreign policy accordingly. Noting that Italy has displayed a mix of cooperation and conflict with France and Germany, our article seeks to answer why this has been the case. Focusing on the impact of party politics on foreign policy, we argue that Italian foreign policy resulted from the political synthesis developed by each of the Italian cabinets ruling since 2016. The political synthesis depended, in turn, on the interplay between party ideology (pro- or anti-EU) and coalition dynamics. A cooperative foreign policy is then related to ideologically divided coalitions and those sharing a pro-EU ideology. On the contrary, an oppositional foreign policy depended on homogeneous, anti-EU coalitions.

1. Introduction

One of the most debated issues among scholars of Italian foreign policy is to make sense of Italy's long-term trends amidst short-term variations. This problem has been evident since the end of the Cold War, with the demise of the so-called 'first Republic' and the consequential rise of a (sort of) bipolar political system. As witnessed most clearly in momentous times, like the 2003 war in Iraq or the 2007 mission in Lebanon, Italian foreign policy has displayed significant alterations due to the succession to power of either centre-left or centre-right coalitions (Andreatta 2008). Along with fluctuations, however, Italian foreign policy has shown remarkable continuities over the past three decades. Some of these continuities have dragged on from the long decades of the Cold War. Successive Italian governments, in fact, followed Atlanticist and Europeanist orientations in foreign policy. After the end of the Cold War, successive governmental coalitions began to swing between an Atlanticist and Europeanist orientation in the pursuit of a foreign policy course. To put it like Cladi and Webber (2011: 216-17),

> A lack of consensus on foreign policy has emerged between the centre-left and centre-right coalitions [...] The resulting controversies have constituted a problem in that successive governments have found it difficult to pursue a pragmatic

foreign policy programme and to define the country's long-term security inter-
ests.

A second, related, point of contention – one that touches not just upon students of
Italian politics, but IR scholars at large – relates to the relative weight of systemic and do-
mestic factors in forging the conduct of foreign policy. This is also a long-standing issue
in the political science literature, and one that has attracted significant attention over
time (see among others Milner 1997 and Fearon 1998). In the case of Italy, this is not just
a theoretical conundrum but also an empirical problem, given the peculiar features of the
domestic political system (notably, a fragmented party system, whose main outcome is
government instability). Moreover, the concomitant change in the early 1990s of the
structure of the international system, along with the rise of the 'second Republic', has
made it difficult to identify their distinct causal effects. For this reason, any attempt to
explain Italian foreign policy in the long term needs to be eclectic to a certain extent (Cladi
and Locatelli 2019), i.e., to blend variables at both levels of analysis.

In this article, we aim to narrow down our dependent variable to Italy's relations with
France and Germany within the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) frame-
work since the Brexit referendum. We opt for this limited fraction of Italian foreign policy
and in such a limited span of time for a variety of reasons. Firstly, France and Germany
are Italy's main (would-be) peers in the European Union (EU) following Brexit; Rome's
approach to Paris and Berlin can then be taken as a proxy for its Europeanism. Secondly,
since the 2016 United Kingdom European Union membership referendum, diplomatic
relations between Rome and Paris have experienced nothing less than a political roller-
coaster (Darnis 2019); it is therefore a most evident case of foreign policy variation which
needs to be explained. Thirdly, very few studies have analysed the impact of Brexit on EU
member states' foreign policy so far – none in fact, to the best of our knowledge, has paid
attention explicitly to the Italian case (although we tried to fill this vacuum in Cladi and
Locatelli 2020).

Therefore, after Brexit, Italy displayed a mix of cooperation and conflict with its pow-
erful European partners. Our questions, simply put, are: why is this so? What explains
such variation? How should we account for both cooperation and tension? In order to
tackle this issue, we first provide a concise overview of the main features of Italy's foreign
policy. We then focus on the impact of party politics on foreign policy from a theoretical
perspective, and we assess the interplay of structural and domestic factors in the case of
Italy's relations with France and Germany. Finally, in the concluding section we wrap up
our argument.

2. The pillars of Italian foreign policy

Foreign policy issues are rarely discussed during electoral campaigns. The March 2018
elections were no exception as the main political forces did not express a coherent foreign
policy strategy (Tocci 2018). Yet, foreign policy can be very important and in Italy foreign
policy decisions can be a factor contributing to the resignation of a Prime Minister. This
happened, for instance, when Prime Minister Romano Prodi resigned in February 2007,
after losing a vote of confidence in the Senate on the proposal to keep troops in Afghani-
stan (BBC 2007). Foreign policy decisions can bring down governments and they can also
become ways to trumpet new courses.

Nevertheless, Italy has traditionally articulated its foreign policy priorities around three pillars: Europe, the transatlantic partnership and the Mediterranean. The 'Europe' pillar involves Italy being in favour of the process of European integration. Backing the process of European integration allowed Italy to pursue three aims: firstly, to secure the country's newly formed democratic institutions after World War II; secondly, to ensure further and continuous economic growth (Bindi 2008), and thirdly, to make Italy's voice be heard in the international community. As far as the transatlantic pillar is concerned, Italy relies on the US as a guarantor of security. Membership of NATO allowed Italy to benefit from protection against the Soviet threat during the Cold War and to keep its defence spending at a minimum. In the aftermath of the Cold War, Italy continued to benefit from membership of NATO but it began to invest more in defence and a lot in terms of political capital and goodwill in NATO initiatives such as the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997 and the NATO-Russia Council, established in 2002 at Pratica di Mare (Stefanini 2014). Finally, the Mediterranean is also a very important pillar of Italian foreign policy. Whilst Italy is undeniably a Mediterranean country, the Mediterranean's importance as a foreign policy circle has been steadily increasing over the past decades and it came to include the Balkans during the 1990s (Carbone 2007).

Whilst Italy had limited independence to develop its own foreign policy during the Cold War, the dissolution of the USSR presented Italy with challenges as well as opportunities. On the one hand, Italy had the opportunity to pursue a pro-active foreign policy course (Tercovich 2017; Carati and Locatelli 2017). On the other hand, Italy was uniquely exposed to a wide array of security threats due to its proximity to the Balkans, where the unravelling of former Yugoslavia led to subsequent civil wars during the 1990s (Dyrstad 2012). Italian governments during the 1990s had to realise that membership of organisations such as the EU, NATO and the UN could no longer provide a low cost security option or guarantee of economic growth (Andreatta 2001). Nevertheless, these organizations provided a unique opportunity for Italy to raise its profile on the international stage, as it could now seek to play a more influential role in contributing to their adaptation and transformation. Subsequently, such opportunities came, for instance, as Italy took part in the reform debate of the United Nations Security Council, proposing, in particular, to create ten new permanent but shared SC seats to be assigned to twenty countries on the basis of certain criteria (Salleo and Pirozzi 2008). In terms of conflict resolution, Italy joined the US, Russia, France, Great Britain and Germany to establish the Contact Group in 1994, with the purpose of coordinating crisis management efforts in Bosnia-Herzegovina and subsequently in Kosovo (Schwegmann 2000).

As opportunities to make the most of membership of international organisations were not lacking, it is no wonder that successive centre-left and centre-right coalitions which alternated in power were in agreement that Italy should remain committed to the EU and NATO (Alcaro 2010). The three circles of Europeanism, Atlanticism and the Mediterranean would continue to influence the broad trajectory of Italian foreign policy (Croci 2008). However, the multitude of challenges which have arisen in recent years have exposed the need for Italian governments to invest more and more resources to tackle them. The challenges and their diverse nature have also exposed the lack of cooperation between states, contributing to a waning of the importance of international institutions. Italian governments have been called on to provide a response to the refugee

crisis, to a resurgent Russia, the Syrian civil war and, lately, to the Coronavirus. Such challenges highlight the unique mix between inter-state, intra-state and transnational security threats, calling for an immediate response and long-term commitment to contain them.

For a country such as Italy, containing such threats presents a unique set of challenges. Firstly, no matter how active a foreign policy course Italy pursues, it is still vulnerable. Secondly, Italy was badly hit by the 2008 economic recession, with Italian governments on both sides of the political spectrum being unable to provide a solution (Di Quirico 2010). Thirdly, Italy had to embark on a series of reforms to make sure it could remain engaged in areas of concern such as the Mediterranean whilst continuing to make good its commitments to ongoing military operations (Ronzitti 2016; Dessi and Olmastroni 2017).

At the same time, Italy needed to carefully manage the relationship with its two European partners, France and Germany. This is an ongoing problem, as we will see. Disagreements have arisen, and they shape the extent to which cooperation can be possible and far-reaching. Most notably, despite the fact that Italy and France share common interests in ending the Libyan civil war, promoting stability in North Africa and the Sahel as well as managing the refugee crisis, their positions on these issues have often differed. Italy's relationship with Germany was made more difficult by the dispute following the Eurozone sovereign debt crisis of 2010-2012.

3. Explaining foreign policy change: the role of parties and government coalitions

These themes opened up opportunities for a theoretical treatment of Italian foreign policy. Drawing from different theoretical streams, several authors have attempted to account for continuity and variation in Italian foreign policy. Among others, Lorenzo Cladi and Mark Webber (2011) adopted a neo-classical realist perspective to assess the extent to which variables such as elite perception of the distribution of power and domestic instability played a role in explaining the variation in the ways in which successive governmental coalitions responded to the different pressures of the post-Cold War international system. Writing from a structural realist perspective, Luca Ratti (2012) argued that there was continuity in the ways in which Italian foreign policy was conducted in the aftermath of the Cold War, still looking for a balance between the tendency to bandwagon with the United States and the search for regional autonomy. On the other hand, taking their distance from the realist view, authors like Paolo Rosa (2014), Fabrizio Coticchia (2014) and Piero Ignazi et al. (2012) have focused on Italy's strategic culture (or lack thereof). Finally, moving beyond mainstream theory, Elisabetta Brighi's (2015) contribution analysed Italian foreign policy comprehensively by drawing on the strategic relational model, which pays more attention to agency in conceptualizing foreign policy as dialectic rather than outcome (see also Hyde-Price 2013).

Differently from previous attempts, here we do not aim to elaborate or adopt a general theory of foreign policy. We will rather focus our attention on a narrower research variable – i.e., the weight of party politics on Italy's relations with France and Germany. In doing so, we borrow from an established literature which generally dates back to the debate on the second level of analysis (Waltz 1967). To be sure, we would not question

whether domestic politics matters – something that to a certain extent we believe is obvious and self-evident – but we will try to assess if, and to what extent, change in Italian foreign policy can be attributed to variations in cabinet coalitions. In order to proceed in an orderly manner, we will first define our variables and, secondly, we will suggest our hypothesis.

Our dependent variable is Italy's behaviour vis-à-vis France and Germany in the context of CSDP after the Brexit vote in June 2016. We take such a short span of time for our observation for a number of reasons: firstly, as we will see, due to government instability, Italy has seen as many as four successive cabinets: Renzi (2014-2016), Gentiloni (2016-2018), Conte I (2018-2019) and Conte II (2019-now). This allows us to observe significant variation in our independent variable. Secondly, Brexit has altered 'the actor constellation and preference configuration around the Brussels negotiating table' (Krotz and Schield 2018, p. 1175): by shifting the regional distribution of power, Brexit has forced most, if not all, EU member states to adjust accordingly. For Italy, Brexit meant losing a powerful ally to rely on (Carbone et al. 2011) and as such, it amounts to nothing less than systemic pressure, to borrow Waltz's (1979) jargon. Third, and partially related to this point, since 2016 France and Germany have revamped their cooperation, both bilaterally and within the EU. To put it bluntly, they have launched a number of initiatives aimed at giving the EU new momentum and, perhaps most importantly, to consolidate their leadership within the EU (Kempin and Kunz 2017).[1]

Subsequently, it is reasonable to expect that Italy had to decide how to respond to the double challenge of a declining voice in the EU arena due to the loss of the UK, and the rising activism of the two main continental powers. We operationalize this variable in terms of available policy options to avoid the risk of irrelevance. In this connection, we assume that strategic adjustment vis-à-vis France and Germany may take one of three forms: a) in a sort of balancing behaviour, one option could be to openly contrast the Franco-German initiatives, with a view to thwarting their bid for leadership; b) an opposite option could be to bandwagon with the Franco-German tandem, trying to open up the club to a third guest; c) the third alternative would be similar to the second one, but with a remarkable difference, i.e., to join arms with one of the two powers and exclude the other. Simply put, in our analysis we expect that Italian policy-makers follow at least one of these paths.

Our independent variable, as mentioned, takes party politics into account. Of course, this term may imply a variety of different meanings (for an overview, see Oktay and Beasley 2017). In fact, the literature has investigated the difference between single-party and coalition cabinets in terms of (*inter alia*) war initiation (Clare 2010), international commitments (Oktay 2014) and extremity in foreign policy (Beasley and Kaarbo 2014; Coticchia and Davidson 2019). Other scholars have focused on the role of junior partners within the coalition (Vignoli, 2020), as well as the interaction between coalition dynamics and the foreign policy machinery (Kaarbo 2012; Oppermann, Kaarbo and Brummer

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[1] Just to name the main initiatives undertaken since June 2016, both countries updated their security strategies; France also championed the idea of a European Intervention Initiative (EII), to be launched independently from the EU. Most importantly, Paris and Berlin called for the advancement of CSDP and Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). Finally, they increased bilateral cooperation in a series of meetings, like the one held in Paris in July 2017 (soon after Emanuel Macron's presidential victory) and Aachen in January 2019 (Krotz and Schield 2018; Kempin and Kunz 2019).

2017) and, most recently, on populist foreign policies (Balfour et al. 2016; Destradi and Plageman 2019).

The four governments under consideration relied on three different ruling coalitions. Interestingly enough, two of them included populist parties. Their different compositions deserve consideration: the Renzi and Gentiloni cabinets were supported by almost identical (grand) coalitions, which included as main partners their home party (*Partito Democratico*, PD), the centrist party *Scelta civica per l'Italia* (founded and led by former prime minister Mario Monti) and the centre-right party *Nuovo Centro Destra* (NCD). Although the PD was the heavyweight in the coalition, it had to negotiate with the NCD (later rebranded as *Alternativa popolare*) to grasp a tiny majority over the opposition parties. The Conte I cabinet, on the other hand, was supported by two main parties, the Five Star Movement (M5S) and The League, in a more compact coalition, which to an extent was marked by a degree of ideological (i.e. populist) affinity. Finally, the current Conte II government is supported by the M5S and the PD, plus Matteo Renzi's own party *Italia Viva*, and the leftist party *Liberi e Uguali*.

Overall, these coalitions present striking differences both in terms of membership and ideological distance. As concerns the former, the grand coalitions supporting Renzi and Gentiloni included four parties to gain majority in both chambers of the Parliament. Differently from his predecessors, in his first cabinet Conte was supported by a coalition of two, while in the current cabinet to have a majority in Parliament he still needs four. However, the main difference relates to ideological orientation: the first two coalitions, although quite heterogeneous, saw an easy convergence towards a traditional – markedly pro-European – foreign policy course (Lucarelli 2015; Felsen 2018). The second coalition, as epitomized by the so-called 'contract of government' (Contratto per il governo del cambiamento 2018), found a common denominator in a revisionist rhetoric ('the government of change') and a markedly oppositional political platform towards the EU. Finally, the current coalition is marked by a deep ideological divide between the populist anti EU orientation of the M5S and the traditional pro-EU stance of the PD.

Summing up, we are left with three different configurations of cabinet coalitions: the first one features an ideologically homogeneous coalition, with a hegemonic party, plus three more crucial parties covering a wide section of the political spectrum (from centre-right to centre-left). The second configuration is a two-party coalition, with one having the upper hand, and still no meaningful ideological divide in terms of foreign policy. The third configuration resembles the first one (still four parties with a dominant one), but is marked by a deep ideological division with respect to foreign policy orientation.

We can now turn our hypothesis to how Italian behaviour towards France and Germany changed because of Brexit. Simply put, our argument is that Italy's behaviour towards France and Germany depended on the political synthesis of the governmental coalition, which in turn is the result of the main party's ideology and ideological homogeneity. More precisely, whilst the dominant party will try to enforce its own foreign policy vision, it will also need to negotiate with its coalition partners. Therefore, in the absence of an ideological cleavage, the leading party will not have to concede much to the partners; however, in the event of other partners sharing opposing visions, a compromise must be found. For these reasons, we expect substantial continuity between Renzi and Gentiloni,

and change from Gentiloni to Conte as well as from Conte I to Conte II. At first blush, a summary of our hypothesis is available in Table 1.

Table 1. Hypothesis on the impact of party ideology (pro-EU, or anti-EU), cabinet coalition, and Italy's behaviour towards France and Germany

Independent variable: Ideology of the leading party	Intervening variable: Cabinet coalition	Dependent variable: Italy's behaviour towards France and Germany
Pro-EU (Renzi/Gentiloni)	Ideologically homogeneous	Participate in Franco-German initiatives
Anti-EU (Conte I)	Ideologically homogeneous	Oppose Franco-German initiatives
Mix of pro-EU anti-EU (Conte II)	Ideologically divided	Mix of participation and opposition

4. Italy's relations with France and Germany after Brexit

As mentioned, within the EU context, the UK has been an important ally for Italy. To put it bluntly, the weight of London in European institutions was perceived (and sometimes used) by Rome as an asset to offset the all-too-evident prominence of Paris and Berlin. Brexit, then, represented a double challenge for Italian policymakers: not only did it undermine the achievements of the integration process, so potentially landing a fatal blow to the EU itself, but it also put the Italian voice within the Union at risk. Following these considerations, the Italian approach towards EU institutions and other member states was marked from the very beginning by a degree of cooperation and diplomatic activism.

In chronological order, the first Italian initiative dates back as early as August 2016 – i.e., just two months after the British vote and a few weeks in advance of the momentous Bratislava summit. Following an editorial authored by the then Minister of Foreign Affairs Paolo Gentiloni and Minister of Defence Roberta Pinotti, the Italian government officially called on other EU states to work on a series of initiatives aimed at pushing ahead the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). It is not possible to describe the details of the Italian proposal; suffice to say that apart from some differences, the Italian roadmap for furthering diplomatic and military cooperation displayed striking similarities to a parallel Franco-German initiative. So, when European leaders met in Bratislava in September 2016, they shared a broad consensus on which steps to undertake. In particular, as formalized in successive EU summits, EU leaders agreed to revamp PESCO, a defence cooperation clause included in the 2007 Lisbon Treaty but never activated before (Council of the EU 2017). So, while de facto a Franco-German effort, PESCO was made possible by the broader consensus it enjoyed. Italy certainly contributed to selling the idea to other states, and probably helped Paris and Berlin frame the initiative in inclusive terms (Marrone 2017). As evidence of the consideration enjoyed by Rome in EU circles, France and Germany invited Italy (along with Spain) to appear as co-signatories of the proposal at the EU summit in November 2017.

Italy's involvement in PESCO was not just a diplomatic move aimed at signalling its ambitions within the EU. Quite the contrary, cognizant of its limited resources, Italy found in PESCO an opportunity to maximize its procurement capabilities and promote the Italian Defence Technology Industrial Base (DTIB) (Marrone 2018). This is confirmed by the sheer number of defence projects launched so far within the PESCO framework that include Italy as a participating country: in the first batch (in the final days of the Gentiloni government) Italy was present in 15 projects out of 17 and took the lead in 4, while France participated in 8 and Germany in 7 (Marrone and Sartori 2019). Moreover, it is worth observing that the three countries are all present in 6 projects, an indicator of Italy's success in being taken as a worthy candidate for the leadership of the EU.

Of the three foreign policy options discussed in the previous paragraph, the diplomatic activism displayed since the Summer of 2016 and the involvement in PESCO seem to conform to the one suggested by our hypothesis: both Renzi and Gentiloni perceived the possibility of intruding on the Franco-German tandem and turning it into a EU-wide triumvirate. These actions have been complemented with a well-known policy of presentialism, which led both prime ministers to portray themselves as honest brokers among EU major powers. For instance, at the end of August 2016, Renzi organized a summit with his French and German counterparts on the tiny but highly symbolic Ventotene island. Similarly, Gentiloni saw an opportunity to raise the Italian status in a series of high-profile events, like the celebrations for the 60th anniversary of the Rome Treaties, which took place in the Italian capital on 25 March 2017, and a couple of months later in the G-7 Summit held in Taormina. Ironically, the most evident effort to be treated as an equal by the two continental powers arrived too late: the draft of a Quirinal Treaty with France – a blueprint for future enhanced cooperation – was elaborated in the final days of Gentiloni's mandate, and could not be signed due to the opposition of Gentiloni's successor, Giuseppe Conte.

As mentioned, the first Conte cabinet was supported by the so-called yellow-green coalition (i.e. the M5S and Matteo Salvini's *The League*). Although the League was traditionally a right-wing party – something that can hardly be said for the M5S (Mosca and Tronconi 2019) – both parties shared a portion of their political platform due to their populist inspiration (see, among others Balfour 2016; Zulianello 2019, pp. 145-156). In particular, their rhetoric and ideology converged towards a radically more sceptical view of the EU and Italy's relations with European partners (Verbeek and Zaslove 2015; Franzosi, Marone, Salvati 2015). Euro-scepticism, combined with their populist attempt to portray themselves as a novelty in the Italian political landscape, led to the specification in their ruling agreement of their ambition to reform EU policies (especially on migration and economic austerity) (Contratto per il governo del cambiamento 2018, pp. 17, 26-28).

Coherently with the coalition's political platform, the Conte I government steered an impressive re-orientation of Italian foreign policy towards its European partners, particularly France. In its few months of life, a number of disputes emerged between Paris and Rome that severely strained their diplomatic ties. Obviously, tensions are an integral and deeply rooted part of the Franco-Italian relationship, so it should come as a surprise to no one if sometimes both states indulge in reciprocal finger pointing. However, what marked a significant departure from the past is the way these disputes were managed by

the government. In a nutshell, coalition leaders deliberately escalated tension with Paris, with a view to increasing internal consensus.

The lowest point was reached in February 2019, when France recalled the ambassador in Rome due to the flamboyant declarations of some senior cabinet figures. But even before that, evidence of Italian opposition to France came with the decision to drop out of the European Intervention Initiative (EII) – an extra-EU project aimed at developing an international rapid reaction force funded by a common budget and guided by a single doctrine. This initiative, championed by President Macron a few months after his election, was met with favour (although half-heartedly) by Gentiloni, who had agreed to participate. However, Conte seemed suspicious of the initiative: apart from duplicating assets otherwise available as NATO members, the main concern of the Prime Minister was to avoid the possibility of France gaining excessive influence in Europe (Marrone 2018, p. 7). Thus, one may conclude that the heightened tension in relations with Paris (and to a lesser extent with Berlin) originated from the competition for consensus between the M5S and the League (Darnis 2019, p. 4), but it is evident that such a strategy is also functional to curb the leadership of the Franco-German tandem.

After the League broke the coalition with the M5S, the Conte II government found an uneasy settlement with the PD. The empirical evidence available in the seven months since the Conte II government was sworn in makes it impossible to say a final word on its foreign policy course. For one thing, it is quite evident that the current approach to the EU and the allies has changed: even in times of hard negotiations with the Commission and within the Eurogroup on the controversial Eurobonds, the current government's approach has been at most one of negotiation, and not mere opposition. Still, we recognise that the Conte II government is a counterfactual case study requiring further investigation as its stance towards the EU is fully revealed.

5. Conclusions

This article has tried to make sense of the variations which have characterised Italian foreign policy towards France and Germany since the 2016 Brexit referendum. Since then, three governmental coalitions have been in power and they differed in several respects. The main difference, in our analysis, relates to the pro- or anti-EU stance of the major party within the government coalition. Secondly, as intervening variable, we observed whether this stance was shared or not by other government parties.

In our argument, we tried to assess if and how government coalitions have an impact on foreign policy. Following this logic, it should come as no surprise that there has been more variation than uniformity with respect to Italy's behaviour towards France and Germany. Whereas Renzi and Gentiloni sought to participate in Franco-German initiatives, the first Conte government decisively opposed and sought to thwart the influence of the Franco-German tandem. Whilst it is too early to tell in terms of the current Conte II cabinet's relationship with France and Germany, it is apparent that the approach has somewhat changed in favour of cooperation, thus resembling the attitude of Renzi and Gentiloni.

In order to trace the causal link between government coalition and foreign policy, we added as an intervening variable the ideological homogeneity of the coalition: the political synthesis resulting from ideology and homogeneity gave rise to a unique foreign

policy course. We found that each dominant party would seek to shape the foreign policy course in accordance with its ideological orientation but it would have to negotiate with its political partners. So, where coalition partners' ideologies converged, the leading party did not need to concede much to its partners. Conversely, where coalition partners' ideologies differed, a compromise had to be found. This is true for pro-EU as well as Eurosceptic parties: both the PD with Renzi and Gentiloni and the M5S with the Conte I government could easily push their agendas, leading respectively to a cooperative and oppositional foreign policy towards France and Germany; differently, while still the main coalition party under the Conte II government, the M5S had to come to terms with the PD, so forsaking its previous attitude.

As mentioned, since the current government came into office just a few months ago, it is not possible to provide a comprehensive assessment of its foreign policy. Furthermore, the COVID-19 crisis has made France and Germany critical allies so as to have all the support Italy needs within the Eurogroup. However, at least so far, both the rhetoric and actions of the Italian Prime Minister suggest a significant change from his previous term.

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